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Crossing the Jordan Together: Recoding the Language of Discipleship Used Among the Tribes of Jesus Followers

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

CROSSING THE JORDAN TOGETHER:

RECODING THE LANGUAGE OF DISCIPLESHIP

AMONG THE TRIBES OF JESUS FOLLOWERS



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

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PROJECT FACULTY:

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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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has been approved by
the Evaluation Committee on March 15, 2023
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my wife, Tricia, and daughter, Sydney.
Their love and support have made my story complete.

Acknowledgments

This journey has been humbling indeed. When moments felt overwhelming, the only way to move forward was on my knees. In no way have I made it this far on my own. It is a journey requiring the support of so many. For their encouragement, I would like to acknowledge those who played a major role:

Jesus Christ: The one who called me to follow and picked me up along the way.

Holy Spirit: The one whose strength from within me made it possible to keep going.

Family and Friends: For their love and support cheering me on.

Loren Kerns, Cliff Berger, Heather Rainey, and Jen Macnab - Without their help, I would still be wandering in the desert.

Faculty Advisor, Dr. Mindy Smith: For her calm and patience.

Mentor Dr. Robert Tuttle, Jr.: For planting the seed to begin this journey and praying daily.

Mentor Pastor Dale Schlafer: For always making me feel that I belonged where God called.

DMin Cohort SCC19: For making this journey joyful. It's a privilege to be among them.

Dr. Leonard Sweet: For giving me my third eye. It's an honor to be covered by his dust.

Lastly, my wife and daughter, Tricia and Sydney, for the sacrifices they made over the years serving alongside me as a pastor, and during this season of study. Their encouragement and prayers made this journey possible.

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List of Abbreviations

NPO – Need/Problem/Opportunity

Glossary

Historic Church. Mainline denominational church older than forty years.

Jesus Follower. An individual who practices and professes the Christian faith.

Life Domains. Divisions of human life categorizing primary social and functional activities.

Marketplace Ministry. Christian activities occurring in secular settings through businesses.

Planted Church. Non-mainline church that begins holding services outside a church building.

Recoding. Redefining the programming language to produce a different outcome.

Research Method

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

Abstract

This Project Portfolio addresses the following NPO: The post-pandemic era leaves many Christians and seekers unmotivated to re-engage with the church. Reconnection is possible by recoding discipleship as thriving, holistic devotional living.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, all churches, regardless of size and vitality prior to the pandemic, were dealing with the same challenges of re-engaging people in the church, especially within their hospitality teams. Therefore, an opportunity arose to bring churches together to find fresh ways to re-engage their faith community where no one is the perceived expert.

I am currently an adjunct professor teaching undergraduate ministry classes. I also serve my church as an intercessory prayer team leader and leadership development training materials team member.

The project addresses the disengagement of churchgoers in a post-pandemic era.¹ With the disengagement of volunteerism, vital Sunday ministries like hospitality are suffering. Additionally, only 39% of Christians are actively engaged in intentional discipleship, where many feel ill-equipped; thus, the need to address this trend is essential.² By recoding discipleship in a way that engages all life domains, not just a slice of life set aside for spiritual things, Christians can see faith as more than something they share with others. This recoding reimagines discipleship as Kingdom Living. The resulting picture is faith at the core of Christian life, outwardly visible through loving relationships flowing through all life domains: Service, Study, Health, Finance, and Mission. Helping people understand their purpose and call beyond the church walls to include work and play ignites their relationship with Jesus in ways that flow back into the church to help others do the same.

¹ Gallup Inc, "U.S. Charitable Donations Rebound; Volunteering Still Down," Gallup.com, January 11, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/388574/charitable-donations-rebound-volunteering-down.aspx>.

² "Two in Five Christians Are Not Engaged in Discipleship," Barna Group, accessed January 21, 2023, <https://www.barna.com/research/christians-discipleship-community/>.

Introduction

The project consists of a book and a website. The book illustrates God at work in one's life outside and inside the church by recoding the language of how one sees and understands discipleship. The book is not intended to be a discipleship program, but instead to present the framework for a new understanding of what discipleship is. The website serves as the delivery vehicle for the next steps. It will provide resources and support for pastors, church leaders, and individuals to engage with the ideas further. The Need/Problem/Opportunity (NPO) this project addresses is the reality of a post-pandemic era leaving many Christians and seekers unmotivated to re-engage with the church. The project takes the position that reconnection is possible by recoding discipleship as thriving, holistic devotional living.

The Journey

DISCOVERY PHASE

When I began this doctoral journey, Covid-19 was recently declared a global pandemic. It was expected to be a three- to four-month period of living cautiously. I was serving my ninth year as the lead pastor at a church founded in 1868 and located in a rural area that was primarily agricultural, with orange groves and cattle. It was unique because while it was a historic church both in age and traditional service, a large building was set aside for kids and youth. It was in that building that we began holding a contemporary service. By this time, the service had existed for seven years and was the larger of our two services, with the other being a traditional service.

Also at this time, I was serving my seventh year as the president of our county ministerial association. Before arriving at this church, I served on the board of a sizeable ministerial association for twelve years. In this role, I witnessed pastors struggling to help their faith community move forward to become more vital in their community. On many occasions, this meant animosity toward large, thriving congregations. The reasoning was either "they are just putting on a show" or "they are just about the numbers." Ironically, it seemed their struggle was also about the numbers. Specifically, *declining* ones. As a lead pastor, I began to engage a thriving church nearby to understand more about what they were doing. I found a Jesus-centric church that honored God's word with a heart to put others before themselves.

It was with this passion and background that I entered this journey to identify why historic churches seemed to have so much distrust toward big, thriving churches.

I started the Discovery Phase with a Need/Problem/Opportunity (NPO) that I identified as: There exists new churches less than twenty years old with a heart for equipping older, historical churches over forty years old for transformational ministry whose efforts are inhibited by the cultural age gap separated by both praxis and mission expectations.

The NPO context included both denominational and non-denominational churches. Its focus was looking at cultural differences between newer churches and historical churches. For research purposes, I focused primarily on large newer churches and smaller historical churches.

A workshop was conducted with stakeholders from the following backgrounds: assistant pastor of a large non-denominational megachurch main campus, senior pastor of a satellite campus of a large non-denominational megachurch, director of a leadership network in a large non-denominational megachurch, ministry leader of pastor coaching network, senior pastor of an older non-denominational church, senior pastor of a historic denominational church, laity of a historic denominational church, and director of small group leadership of large non-denominational megachurch (two of these participants from the large megachurch were formerly pastors of historic churches.)

The first workshop exercise was a deep dive into the NPO statement with a "Post-Up Activity" followed by a reframing of the NPO. The following exercise was an "Empath Map" looking at the potential outcome of a solved NPO followed by the question, "Why isn't that the case now?" The final exercise was a "Why? 1-5" challenge. This allowed the stakeholders to look at their common and contrasting root causes of the NPO.

At the end of the workshop, the stakeholders agreed on the following NPO summary statement: Considering both new churches and older historical churches (audience), we've discovered that due to assumptions, there is a lack of trust (NPO), which is caused by mutual brokenness (root cause). If solved, it would mean they would feel valued, respected, and encouraged to collaborate to reach people for Jesus (outcome).

Following the Discovery Workshop, I conducted three one-on-one interviews via Zoom and phone. The interviewees were truly diverse. All the interviewees agreed with the NPO summary, which they received in advance, along with the workshop summary. Interviewee A was a fifth-generation pastor from small historical churches who now serves as a senior pastor in a new global megachurch. This provided an incredibly unique perspective for this research. For Interviewee A, what stood out most was the growing gap between leadership training events becoming increasingly skewed for new churches, leaving historical churches behind. Interviewee B serves as a senior pastor at an older historic church. For this pastor, what stood out most was the resistance of the congregation to understand that change is necessary, thus creating a gap in communication to learn from newer, contrasting church cultures. Finally, Interviewee C, who is retired from twelve years of working with new church development in a large denomination, said, "One historical church in a large downtown area once said to me, 'Why would we want new people here?' Sometimes there is nothing you can do to help them."

The stakeholders determined early that church size was not a significant factor in the two identified church categories in the NPO. Instead, the gap in communication appeared to be differences in the cultural DNA of how churches first opened their doors. Generations of families attending a historical church came to depend on being served versus a newer church birthed in a way that requires everyone to serve for the church to exist.

For historical churches trying to learn from newer churches, this can cause a gap in communication due to a blindness to the assumptions of the congregation's role. This can lead to frustration, trust issues, fear, suspicion, and resistance to letting go of pride. For the newer churches who sincerely want to help other churches, there also exists frustration due to the gap in language between the two. These assumptions have resulted in mutual pain, fear, mistrust, and brokenness. While it may be assumed that the hurt exists only with the older historical churches towards the newer large churches, the workshop and interviews indicated that not to be the case. Instead, there is apparent hurt and mistrust experienced on both sides of these two groups.

DESIGN PHASE

As a result of the work conducted in the Discovery Workshop, the original NPO was reframed to the followings statement: The culture that takes root at the birth of a church over forty years old and the culture at a church plant less than twenty years old are diametrically opposed to one another, thus limiting collaboration for the shared mission of reaching new people for Jesus Christ.

To identify solutions to the NPO, the following stakeholders were brought together for a workshop: a Licensed Practicing Therapist, Community Engagement Director at Christian Counseling Organization, Assimilation Director, Hospitality Pastor, Church Mediation Coach, Associate Pastor (12k attendance), and Lead Pastor (200 attendance).

The Design Workshop's first exercise investigated the cultural DNA's core cause within the two identified groups in the NPO. Using an atomize exercise, the focus group identified the primary need systems that exist at the birth of both a church plant startup and a historical church. Early needs of church plant systems include location team, setup team, service teams, finance team, and lead pastor. Historical church startups typically include trustee team to purchase property, finance team, oversight board, and staff board for selecting and hiring a lead pastor. After identifying adjectives, verbs, and nouns describing the different cultures, the focus group summarized the distinctions: Church Plant = Serving/Non-Ownership, and Historical Church = Controlling/Ownership. Cultural differences between planted and historical churches, influenced by organizational structure, impose different expectations on leadership. Therefore, the language of each group is filtered through diametric lenses, resulting in antithetical solutions.

Next was a Challenge/Need exercise to identify similarities and differences between the NPO subjects. They were followed by a BrainWriting exercise for digging deep into the challenges and needs. Group members then Dot Prioritized the ideas and executed a 5-Whys exercise to better understand the issues. The final exercise was a Napkin Pitch overview to clarify how to achieve the final three ideas to explore as solutions to the NPO.

Following the Design Workshop, one-on-one interviews were held to acquire an outside perspective on the work completed in the workshop. Interviewee A is a lead pastor (non-denominational church of 300), walking through a merger with another denominational church that asked to be folded into Interviewee A's church. This interviewee agreed that church structure leadership organization drives culture and said, "I've heard it said, 'bad structure can make good

people do bad things’,” referring to historical church culture. Interviewee B is a business executive (Christian) involved in marketplace ministry through their business co-laboring with other business leaders doing the same. This interviewee stated, “There must be a willingness to value the past but not live in it,” further remarking, “Grace in the church is hard to come by.” Finally, Interviewee C is a worship pastor (denominational church of 150) walking their church through changes to bring vitality back into the church. This interviewee stated that their church is currently on the cusp between planted vs. historical culture, further remarking, “Love the move towards Christ-centered and less program driven.”

Identifying the impact on the lens of hospitality seen as being served vs. serving others is compelling. However, as I worked to determine the MVP for this project, I struggled with the risks identified in the workshop. Stakeholders identified that the risks of attempting to identify culture, especially if it is toxic, include volatile disruption to the community environment. Additional risks include a lack of endurance to complete the necessary change and failure to create a safe environment for the task at hand, which may cause harm.

By this time in the doctoral process, the Covid-19 pandemic proved far more impacting than first imagined. Churches were shut down for extended periods, and rebounding would prove arduous. Suddenly, churches large and small, recently planted and historical, faced a common challenge. Moreover, the post-pandemic need to get people back into the church and re-engaged was on everyone’s agenda, where no one was a perceived expert.

I determined to introduce a Christ-centric discipleship model to begin a fresh conversation around the language of discipleship in a way that would bring people together to re-engage the church in a post-pandemic era.

Therefore, the project developed into two parts that met the objectives of the Design Workshop. Bring leaders together, cast new vision, and offer ways to stay engaged with new learning. Part one of the project is a book that addresses the desire of the stakeholders to communicate Christ-centeredness throughout the church, ensuring continuity. Part two is a website that offers the benefit of engaging pastors and church leaders through online cohorts or individual coaching. This vehicle also provides the means to provide information to the church body at large and maintains engagement through updated information.

Presenting the MVP as a tandem approach was tested with success by meeting design benchmarks during the Project Delivery phase.

DELIVERY PHASE

Taking the learning from the Design Research and the decision to reframe the solution, the final NPO was developed: The post-pandemic era leaves many Christians and seekers unmotivated to re-engage with the church. Reconnection is possible by recoding discipleship as thriving, holistic devotional living.

As part of the Project Delivery phase, the book and website were developed around recoding discipleship with faith and our relationship with Jesus as the center flowing through all life domains. Emails were sent to stakeholders to participate in a survey to review and respond with feedback on project materials. Stakeholders included directors of hospitality and assimilation ministries at a megachurch with twelve thousand attending weekly, pastors of mainline denominations, pastors of small non-denominational churches, church lay leaders, Christian counselors, and Christian business owners of multi-million-dollar businesses. Fifteen stakeholders responded by reviewing the website and reading a forty-seven-page written sample of the book, then completing the online survey.

The solution met with results that exceeded the eighty percent benchmark threshold. The following results occurred. One hundred percent of stakeholders agreed there is value in offering discipleship strategies targeting multiple life domains in a post-Christendom culture beyond occasional church events and programs. One hundred percent of stakeholders agreed that there is value in helping people understand that their faith life is not separate from the other domains of their life. Additionally, one hundred percent of stakeholders agreed that the book, with its supporting website, provides churches practical tools to reestablish relationships with post-pandemic disengaged Christians and seekers by offering a fresh proposal of discipleship as thriving holistic living in multiple life domains. Finally, one hundred percent of stakeholders agreed that an opportunity exists to bring people together by working on something new that requires innovative input from everyone, where no one is the perceived expert.

The Learning

Like everyone in my cohort, navigating Covid-19 as a pastor was overwhelming. Working on streaming services, finding new ways to stay engaged with the congregation, and figuring out how to preach to an empty room was challenging. Additionally, one year into the program, I found myself going through a difficult separation from the church where I served as pastor for ten years. However, I am drawing from all these experiences to see God at work in my project.

Indeed, there is a risk associated with recoding discipleship to include life domains outside of what has been related to the role of the church. However, the upside addresses a desired benefit that emerged out of the Design Workshop: modeling Christ as the center has a global impact throughout the church community. Alignment grounded in God's word builds unity, leading to a mission focus that is Christocentric rather than program-centric.

Alternative approaches to the NPO that were identified in the Design Workshop included creating coaching networks and leadership workshops. These approaches could have been used to address the final NPO; however, they either present issues with maintaining a training process for an ongoing evolving network of coaches, or they limit the advantage of using online technology to refresh content to be made available to everyone easily. This solution may not have been as feasible before the pandemic, but during the Covid-19 shutdown, people of all ages became more tech savvy than ever.

One of the most significant observations during the research was the shift in the responses for churches to work together toward discovering solutions for reaching the lost. At the onset of Covid-19, respondents from mega-churches were less likely to see the benefit of working with smaller churches. They were eager to share what they had learned but did not see the benefit to them in working together. However, when similar questions were asked with the final project, post-pandemic, all mega-church respondents saw a mutual benefit of working together.

Next Steps

Recently, I listened to a podcast of pastor and author Carey Nieuwhof interviewing Timothy Keller. Founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York City, now retired, who has authored several bestselling books on church theology. In this interview, Keller talks about how the separation of church and state has hurt the church.³ This requires further research as it opens further discussion around this project's focus on getting our faith in life domains outside of the church. If Keller is correct, which I suspect he is, this opens the door to explaining why faith is only perceived as a slice of our life, where the rest of our life belongs to the state.

Upon completing this Doctoral Project, I intend to finish writing the book and finish the development of the website to aid the promotion of the book and continuously engage with church leaders and laity on an ongoing basis. I see this work as a response to God's call for my vocation and ministry in the season ahead.

Conclusion

After much prayer and discernment, I felt led by God to begin this journey and thought I was clear on how that story would end. However, as Jesus does so well, he interrupted my assumptions. Finding myself going through such a change by no longer serving as a lead pastor, I was compelled to ask God, "Why is this happening? I thought I knew what you needed me to do. I thought I knew the end of the story." What I heard from God at that moment was, "The final chapter was never yours to write. It has always been mine." While where I am today was certainly not where I imagined, I am excited about finishing this project and seeing where Jesus takes it for his purposes. Therefore, I have decided to stop dreaming about the future. I'm just trusting God with the rest of the story!

³ Carey Nieuwhof, "CNLP 548: Tim Keller on the Rise and Fall of the American Evangelical Church, Pastoral Moral Failures, Justice and Forgiveness, and Liberal Democracy and Nominal Christianity," CareyNieuwhof.com, January 26, 2023, <https://careynieuwhof.com/episode548/>.

Doctoral Project

Introduction

This doctoral project is a book that seeks to recode the traditional language of discipleship commonly limited to spiritual practices such as volunteerism, financial giving, biblical study at home or in small groups, and church attendance. This will be done by publishing a book that illustrates the foundation behind a new discipleship paradigm and creating a website that offers resources for church leaders and Christians to take the next steps toward what is defined as Kingdom Living.

The project will be showcased by first presenting an illustration visually communicating the idea behind this new paradigm for discipleship. Showcasing the book begins with the vision for the cover art and chapter structure to illustrate the teaching approach for the book. Following will be a sample chapter that communicates the background behind the work and writing approach. Finally, the website will be showcased with sample pages to demonstrate the resources that will be made available to pastors, churches, and laity.

Presentation of Project

Recoding the Language of Discipleship

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

—John 10:10

In 2016, while it wasn't understood then, God gave me a vision for recoding discipleship that I presented to my district superintendent as an update to the goals of the church where I served as the lead pastor. Traditionally, faith is considered one life domain or slice among other domains such as health, work, finance, and family. During the development of this presentation, God impressed upon me the need to reframe traditional thinking and develop a new paradigm where faith was no longer a slice of life but, for the disciple, the core or center from which all life flows. Because of the paradigm that overshadows the word discipleship, I decided to recode the language and reimagine discipleship and call it Kingdom Living. The resulting picture is Christocentric faith at the core of Christian life, outwardly visible through Loving Relationships flowing through all life domains: defined as Service (loving neighbors as ourselves), Study (pursuing the mind of Christ), Health (celebrating our humanity and healing power), Finance (sacrificing idols to put God first), and Mission (witnessing through Holy power). The illustration below in Figure 1 was presented in 2016 with minor tweaks to category descriptions. The illustration provides a lens through which to interpret the following project made possible through this doctoral journey.



FIGURE 1: KINGDOM LIVING

Followers of the way, as Christianity was called during the first several centuries, were focused on doing life together. Jesus-followers ate together, worked together, shared finances, served one another, and worshiped together. In his book *Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World*, Gerald Sittser writes of second-century theologian Clement of Alexandria's ideals of discipleship. Sittser highlights Clement's inclusive, holistic approach:

Christians followed a program suitable for discipleship, which resulted in 'moral loveliness.' And in the case of those who have been trained according to this influence: their gait in walking, their sitting at the table, their food, their sleep, their going to bed, their regimen, and the rest of their mode of life, acquire a superior dignity. For such a training as is pursued by the Word is not overstrained, but is of the right tension.⁴

Discipleship was a theology of living where faith was not a segment of life, but the center of all life. Stephen W. Smith, author, pastor, church planter, and founder of Potter's Inn, a Christian ministry

⁴ Gerald L. Sittser, *Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 161.

devoted to spiritual formation and the care of the soul, states, “As a doctor, Luke recorded insights about health and lifestyle issues. He was concerned with showing us how Jesus lived, not just His teachings. Luke’s use of Greek is excellent, as scholars have noted, and shows that he was an expert in accurately describing the Jesus way.”⁵

However, disciple makers today refrain from discussing money and work, limiting the discussion to tithing once a week. Health is reduced to prayer for healing to fix what is broken after the fact rather than an honest discussion about healthy living. Ben Witherington, a prolific author, a research fellow at Cambridge University, and currently Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, argues, “Yet, upon reflection, I think I know the reason we don’t much find Christian writing about eating and drinking—the problem is, many Christians have seriously guilty consciences (especially Western Christians) about their eating and drinking habits, and they don’t want to be reminded of what they ought to be doing.”⁶

Barna Research, in their *March 2022 State of the Church* report, in the chapter entitled, “Flourishing People,” recommends, “that church leaders understand their own capacity to promote holistic health in their congregations and become more aware of how spiritual formation and church attendance have meaningful connections to the flourishing of individuals.”⁷ Adding, “Most pastors (80%) agree there is a difference between financial stability and financial flourishing. They’re also aware of the discipleship needs surrounding money as many Christians struggle to connect their spiritual life to financial decisions.” Furthermore, in that same report, Barna states, “Leaders who dismiss the importance of well-being risk missing a key dimension of discipleship. Past and recent studies show that U.S. adults who are plugged into congregations fare better than those who do not, and there are multiple reasons worship communities might provide psychological, social, financial and health benefits to participants, directly or indirectly.”⁸

Church culture plays an integral role in overall congregant well-being and is a determining factor in building a flourishing community. In this unprecedented time, churches can work together ecumenically to discover how a new understanding of discipleship can be life-giving to both church and neighboring communities. A holistic view of walking together in faith, supporting one another in our vocation, finances, and health. Serving together locally and missionally across the world. Centered on maintaining loving relationships with Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and neighbor through prayer, worship, and generosity in which all things flow. This project provides two different

⁵ Stephen W. Smith, *The Jesus Life: Eight Ways to Recover Authentic Christianity*, Reprint edition (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 55.

⁶ Ben Witherington III, *The Rest of Life: Rest, Play, Eating, Studying, Sex from a Kingdom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 65.

⁷ Barna Group, “Flourishing People,” Barna Group, accessed March 10, 2022, <https://barngroup.com/reports/soyc-chapter-1>.

⁸ Barna Group, “Flourishing People.”

communication vehicles to broaden what it means to grow as a Jesus follower and the role of the church to teach Kingdom Living. The first is a book communicating the why and the what that includes talking points for small groups. The second is a website that provides resources and support to take the next step.

The Book: Crossing the Jordan Together

THE BOOK COVER

And as for your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it. But as for you, turn, and journey into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea.

—Deuteronomy 1:39-40

For the Israelites, what could have taken eleven days⁹ turned into forty years, much like that of the church today, filled with complaining, doubt, significant loss, and fear. The tribes of Israel couldn't cross over into this new beginning without God taking the first step. "And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap."¹⁰ As it was for the people of Israel, so it has been for the modern church. Years of wandering have divided both the people of the church and the leaders of their tribes, as research for this project supports.

The research and development for this project began with the mission of understanding the struggle between churches over forty years old and church plants less than twenty years old working together to do kingdom work in their communities. Was it jealousy? Was it pride? According to the 2020 US Religion Census and the General Social Survey,¹¹ newer churches continue to grow, while mainstream churches continue to decline. Was this the root cause? During an early workshop with pastors and laity from both segments, it was discovered that much of the struggle was due to cultural differences that led to diametrically opposed expectations and language for discipleship. Various workshop exercises determined this was due to their understanding of hospitality and organization structure. So, the solution appeared to be to deal with the culture within struggling churches head-on. But the question remained, "Could a solution be developed without encountering a defensive posture by the churches you were trying to help?"

⁹ Deuteronomy 1:2 (ESV).

¹⁰ Joshua 3:13 (ESV).

¹¹ Ryan P. Burge, "Nondenominational Churches Are Adding Millions of Members. Where Are They Coming From?" Christianity Today, August 5, 2022, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/august/nondenominational-growth-mainline-protestant-decline-survey.html>.

As this project progressed, the world entered a post-pandemic period. People began slowly returning to Sunday church services, but volunteerism remained down. Now, churches large and small, historic and new, have arrived together at this historic milestone, where no one is certain what to do. As it was with the tribes of Israel, the church is called to embark together beyond the milestone of this shared experience, unified by their humility, and moving ever forward into the uncharted territory of a post-pandemic world.

The cover art for the book reflects the imagery of both the Old and New Testaments. The hook and the red lettering symbolize the fisher of humankind¹² and the blood that would be the entryway to the promised land. The river symbolizes the line where all the tribes stood together for the first time. The rocks represent the struggle of waiting on the Lord for provision and guidance,¹³ and the symbol of unity when the tribes move forward together. "We will use these stones to build a memorial. In the future your children will ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' Then you can tell them, 'They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the Lord's Covenant went across.' These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever."¹⁴

The title of this book and the cover design together are a metaphor for the church today. As the tribes of the church all stand humbly together, seeking to understand how to adapt to what lies ahead and how best to re-engage the people of the church. Ironically, what appeared to be the darkest period for the twenty-first-century church may have opened the door of opportunity, with Christ waiting on the other side.

¹² Matthew 4:19 (NLT).

¹³ Numbers 20:10-12 (ESV).

¹⁴ Joshua 4:6-7 (NLT).

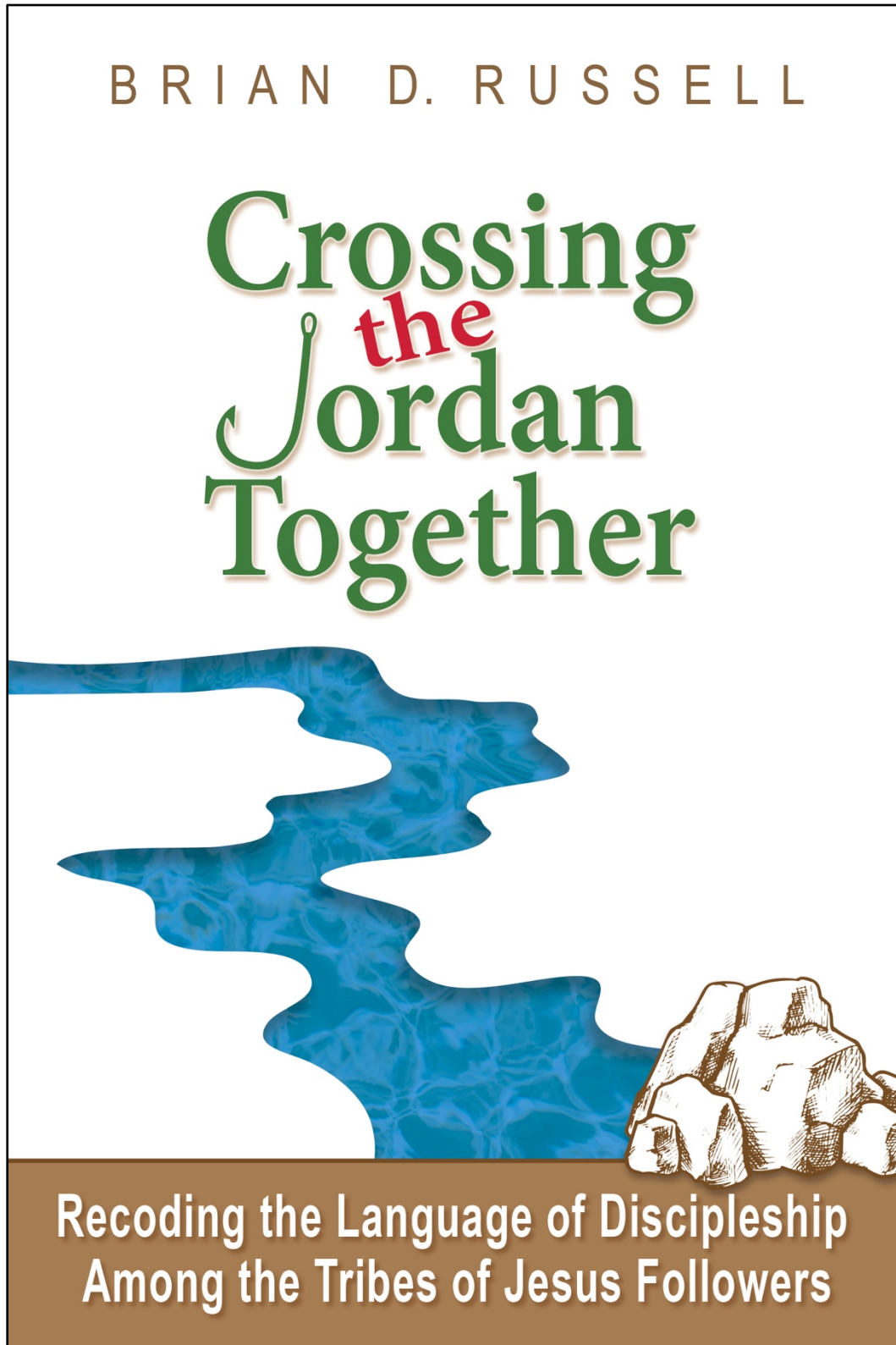


FIGURE 2: BOOK COVER ART, DESIGN BY BRIAN RUSSELL

BOOK CHAPTER OUTLINES

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.

—Mark 1:16-18

The goal of this book is not to help develop a leadership culture in the church. The proliferation of leadership programs in the church has escalated to a point where being a leader has become a sign of being a mature Christian. Therefore, the goal is to create a servant culture that disciples Christians to become servant influencers who grow to become servant followers witnessing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

I have chosen to illustrate this recoding of discipleship through my personal story. This is not because my story is the big story but because it is part of God's story; it's all God's story. When Jesus told the fisherman, "Come follow me," He didn't ask them to learn a new vocation. Instead, Jesus said, "I will teach you how to be a disciple through your daily life, fishermen who know how to catch people along the way." Three years later, Jesus instructed, "keep living your life as my disciple, teaching others as I have taught you."¹⁵ God is using my story to reveal to the reader that being a disciple isn't something you do; it's who you are as a Jesus follower living in God's Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.

The prologue sets up the purpose and uses of the book. The introduction chapter provides the background behind the vision. It contains an essential overview of this book's proposition. The first five chapters are each organized by one season of my life. They begin with my life story for that season. Following my story is the understanding and research behind the Kingdom Value and Discipleship Domain illustrated during that period. Next, each chapter has a theme tied to that season of life defined by the title, subtitle, and scripture. The theme then becomes the bridge to the Kingdom Value and Discipleship Domain.

Together, the first five chapters lay the foundation for recoding discipleship as Kingdom Living discussed in chapter six. The final chapter is a clarion call to move together as the church, as did the tribes of Israel who found themselves together embarking on a pivot at the river Jordan before them, so too are the tribes of the church today. This final chapter addresses the question, "Okay, now I know why we're here. Where do we go next?" At the end of each chapter are questions a team or small group can use to work through the journey of recoding discipleship together.

Chapters one through three and five through seven will be completed as outlined in Figures 3 through 14 below. These snapshots showcase the vision and storyline behind each chapter, along

¹⁵ Matthew 28:19-20.

with sample questions for the reader to observe how God is working in their lives. In addition, a working bibliography is included for each chapter to illustrate the work drawn from in the writing that that chapter to support the corresponding Kingdom Value and Discipleship Domain. Following the snapshots, Chapter four is included in its entirety. The complete book at this stage in the project, including the prologue and introduction chapters, is included in Appendix A.

Chapter 1

NEW BEGINNINGS

Seeking normal.

"This means that anyone who belongs to
Christ has become a new person.
The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"
2 Corinthians 5:17

Kingdom Value: Identity Discipleship Domain: Health

Growing up with a birth defect. Feeling different and seeking what it means to be normal. Accepting Jesus Christ in my life. Developing an interest in health. These experiences would shape my identity. It would take a lifetime to begin to understand my identity in Jesus is in we, not me.

This chapter focuses on the Kingdom Value of what it means to understand our identity in Jesus Christ and how our identity in Christ can free us from our limitations where our weakness is turned into our greatest strengths. Additionally, it focuses on the Discipleship Domain of Health. Why is it that the church tends to limit the conversation of physical health to prayer for healing and not support one another in healthy living? Jesus did His most significant work around a table. Shouldn't it look like He prepared it for our well-being?

FIGURE 3: CHAPTER 1 OUTLINE A

SAMPLE SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How have your past experiences shaped your self-image?
2. Has health ever caused a limiting belief about your self-image?
3. In what ways can you see how your Christian identity has become church identity?
4. What steps can you take now to better understand your new identity in Jesus Christ?

Working Resources

The Works of John Wesley Volume 32: Medical and Health Writings -
Dr James Donat, and Randy L. Maddox, eds.

Not a Fan: Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus -
Kyle Idleman

We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology -
James H. Evans, Jr

24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life - Matthew Sleeth, and
Eugene H. Peterson.

Food and God: A Theological Approach to Eating, Diet, and Weight Control -
Joel R. Soza

The Jesus Prescription for a Healthy Life - Leonard Sweet

Health and Medicine in the Evangelical Tradition: "Not by Might Nor Power" -
Leonard Sweet

The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life - Rick Warren, Dr Daniel Amen,
and Dr Mark Hyman.

Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating - Norman Wirzba

FIGURE 4: CHAPTER 1 OUTLINE B

Chapter 2

EXPOSED

Manual Override.

"Bring all who claim me as their God,
for I have made them for my glory.
It was I who created them."

Isaiah 43:7

Kingdom Value: Purpose Discipleship Domain: Study

Baptized but without a clear direction. Photography exposed me to a life without a rabbi and a sense of purpose that was out of focus. I would wander without direction, studying to become a photographer, a make-up artist, and finally, an A/V producer trying to control my circumstances manually.

This chapter focuses on the Kingdom Value of what it means to understand our purpose and how it directs our life. Additionally, it focuses on the Discipleship Domain of Study. Does study only include the Bible, or should it also have a randomization of learning about culture in a time such as this? This chapter embraces what it means to pursue the mind of Christ and an understanding of God's word in relationship with the world filled with the people made in God's image.

FIGURE 5: CHAPTER 2 OUTLINE A

SAMPLE SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel your life has purpose?
2. How do you understand your purpose in relation to the church?
3. Do you struggle with studying God's word daily?
4. What steps can you take now to discover God's purpose for you?

Working Resources

Grasping God's Word, Fourth Edition: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible - J. Scott Duvall, J. Daniel Hays, and Mark L. Strauss and Kevin J. Vanhoozer

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Fourth Edition - Gordon D. Fee, and Douglas Stuart

Faith Driven Entrepreneur: What It Takes to Step Into Your Purpose and Pursue Your God-Given Call to Create - Henry Kaestner, J. D. Greear, Chip Ingram, and Lecrae

Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible - E. Randolph Richards, and Brandon J. O'Brien

The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For? - Rick Warren

The Band Meeting: Rediscovering Relational Discipleship in Transformational Community - Kevin M. Watson, and Scott T. Kisker

The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God - Dallas Willard

The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives - Dallas Willard

FIGURE 6: CHAPTER 2 OUTLINE B

Chapter 3

NON-LINEAR

Reengineering the process.

"Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being."

Philippians 2:7

Kingdom Value: Humility

Discipleship Domain: Finance

Suddenly the seasons changed with exposure to corporate life. Continuing in communications, I found myself now telling stories in videos and product packaging. During this season, I learned to think in a non-linear way.

This chapter focuses on the Kingdom Value of what it means to understand humility. Too often, we attach shame to our past and confuse humility with humiliation. Additionally, it focuses on the Discipleship Domain of Finance. Is God only concerned with 10% of our finances? Should money management be limited to a course checked off a list? How does one's relationship with money daily impact their relationship with others? Is anxiety caused by misplaced security in money? Do Jesus followers trust Him enough to include letting God take over their finances? This chapter discusses what it means to

FIGURE 7: CHAPTER 3 OUTLINE A

sacrifice our idols to put God first and to understand the distinction between our relationship with money outside of work.

Sample Small Group Questions

1. What areas in your life cause you to feel the most anxiety?
2. What areas in your personal life and work do you find yourself needing to control?
3. Have you ever experienced your relationship with finances causing you to feel pride or shame?
4. What steps can you take now to better understand Christian humility as sign of contentment?

Working Resources

The Generosity Factor: Discover the Joy of Giving Your Time, Talent, and Treasure - Ken Blanchard

Trusting God - Jerry Bridges

Halftime: Moving from Success to Significance - Bob Buford, and Jim Collins

Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership - John Dickson

Winning the War on Worry: Cultivate a Peaceful Heart and a Confident Mind - Louie Giglio

Success by Design: Ten Biblical Secrets to Help You Achieve Your God-Given Potential - Peter Hirsch

Humility: True Greatness - C. J. Mahaney, and Mark Dever

Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life - Henri J. M. Nouwen

FIGURE 8: CHAPTER 3 OUTLINE B

Chapter 5

SERVANT FOLLOWER

Leading from behind.

"Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

Luke 22:42

Kingdom Value: Submission

Discipleship Domain: Service

You don't find leadership; leadership finds you. This epiphany struck me while getting my MDiv. This would provide a mantra for leading leaders as a pastor. In contrast, has the church elevated leadership to be seen as a milestone of mature discipleship?

This chapter focuses on the Kingdom Value of what it means to trust in submission and to understand our relationship to authority. A leader is the opposite of a controller. Christ's witness of obedience was not for His benefit but for His followers. Additionally, it focuses on the Discipleship Domain of Service. Understanding what it means to serve others before ourselves is a personal commandment and a clarion call for the church body.

FIGURE 9: CHAPTER 5 OUTLINE A

Sample Small Group Questions

1. What does independence mean to you?
2. When you hear the word authority, how does it make you feel?
3. Where in your life do you struggle with authority?
4. What steps can you take now to see submission as a strength and a dependence on the Holy Spirit?

Working Resources

The Cost of Discipleship - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Eric Metaxas

Finding God's Life for My Will: His Presence Is the Plan - Mike Donehey

Sanctity without Starch: A Layperson's Guide to a Wesleyan Theology of Grace - Robert G. Tuttle, Jr.

Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ - Eugene H. Peterson

I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus - Leonard Sweet

Strong in the Broken Places: A Theological Reverie on the Ministry of George Everett Ross - Leonard Sweet

Renovated: God, Dallas Willard, and the Church That Transforms - E. James Wilder

Calling & Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life - William H. Willimon

FIGURE 10: CHAPTER 5 OUTLINE B

Chapter 6

KINGDOM LIVING

Recoding discipleship.

"You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life."

JOHN 5:39-40

Incarnate living with a Pentecost expectation!

When did faith become a slice of our lives alongside health, finance, marriage, social relationships, and serving the church? It's time to recode discipleship. When faith rules all life domains, it's called "Kingdom living." To be a thriving church is defined by people who are in pursuit of faithfully giving all of their life domains to Jesus. Telling the church that certain parts of our lives are not a church matter is like telling Jesus that parts of our lives are none of His business. So, what does discipleship look like when followers of the way give it all to Jesus and live with Holy Spirit power? This chapter brings together the first five chapters and develops a different picture of what discipleship looks like when faith is at the center, and loving relationships flow through all life domains.

FIGURE 11: CHAPTER 6 OUTLINE A

Sample Small Group Questions

1. What relationships are most important to you?
2. Are there areas in your life that you need to abandon to follow Jesus?
3. Have you considered relationships with money, work, and health part of your faith life?
4. What steps can you take now to understand discipleship as life outside the church?

Working Resources

Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity - Luke Bretherton

Celebration of Discipline, Special Anniversary Edition: The Path to Spiritual Growth - Richard J. Foster

Think, Act, Be Like Jesus: Becoming a New Person in Christ - Randy Frazee, and Robert Noland

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God - Timothy Keller

The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire - Alan Kreider

God Is Closer Than You Think: This Can Be the Greatest Moment of Your Life Because This Moment Is the Place Where You Can Meet God - John Ortberg

The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters - Priya Parker

From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed - Leonard Sweet

The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work - Leonard Sweet

FIGURE 12: CHAPTER 6 OUTLINE B

Chapter 7

CROSSING TOGETHER

Pilgrimage of faith.

"They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity - all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved."

Acts 2:46-47

When God brings the Tribes together a new thing happens!

Now together, we arrive at the same spot, much like the tribes of Israel when they arrived at the Jordan on the edge of the promised land. But they had to get their feet wet before the waters would part. It's not a journey; it's a pilgrimage. A journey has a destination in mind. Like the disciples of Jesus, only our rabbi knows where we are going. A place where trust and faith merge. As tribes, we are entering a renewed baptism and discovering what it means to see the signs of Jesus in the world. Who patiently waits for the church to catch up to begin a new thing. You have just heard the why, it's time to discuss how!

FIGURE 13: CHAPTER 7 OUTLINE A

Sample Small Group Questions

1. Have you considered yourself on a pilgrimage with Jesus?
2. Where have you seen Jesus in the most unlikely places?
3. Are there lessons from the post-pandemic era that you think would be valuable to further understand or successes that would benefit other church leaders?
4. What steps can you take now to answer the call of Jesus to “follow me” and teach others as Jesus taught us along the way?

Working Resources

Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication - Crystal L. Downing

You're Not Listening: What You're Missing and Why It Matters - Kate Murphy

Leading Change Without Losing It: Five Strategies That Can Revolutionize How You Lead Change When Facing Opposition - Carey Nieuwhof, and Reggie Joiner.

Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation - Parker J. Palmer

11: Indispensable Relationships You Can't Be Without - Leonard Sweet

Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future - Leonard Sweet, and Mark Chironna

“Two in Five Christians Are Not Engaged in Discipleship.” Accessed January 21, 2023. <https://www.barna.com/research/christians-discipleship-community/> - Barna Group

Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices - Frank Viola, and George Barna

God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath - N. T. Wright

FIGURE 14: CHAPTER 7 OUTLINE B

BOOK CHAPTER 4**Chapter 4****OUTSIDE THE WALLS**

Hearing the call.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.
And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—
in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

Kingdom Value: Listening

Discipleship Domain: Mission

I find myself now on the streets—not literally, but as a business owner supporting other business owners to be communicators. Surprisingly, God walked me through understanding the ministry of work. Marketplace Ministry would be my new home for a season.

This chapter focuses on the Kingdom Value of what it means to understand listening. To truly listen means being vulnerable to being changed by what you hear. Additionally, it focuses on the Discipleship Domain of Mission. Is mission in ministry limited to jobs at the church? If God calls everyone to be in ministry, is being a pastor or church leader held in higher regard than working in the secular world? How well does the church help others understand their work as ministry in the same way they are encouraged to participate on mission trips? Mission, for Christ’s followers, is not a state of doing; it’s a state of being.

The Story.

Coming out of this difficult transition into a new season of my life would not be the last challenge for my family and me. For the past ten years, my life has been dedicated to corporate culture,

surrounded by people and a path set by the vision of upper management. A workaholic is now feeling the isolation of a familiar past. A people pleaser who spent a decade serving others is now feeling lost without purpose once again. The one personal trait that would carry me forward would be my tolerance for risk-taking. However, this is not a particular trait that my wife feels comfortable with, so it would be challenging for her. To this day, I am grateful for her patience with me and her willingness to trust my decision for the season ahead. What we did not know at the time would be the extreme peaks and valleys lying ahead that would change the trajectory of our lives together.

Soon, I sensed the opportunity to lean on my past experiences and start my own business. I began my career working for myself, so it felt natural to do it again. This time it wouldn't be photography, but my path would now lead me to pursue using my new skills learned over the past decade. I combined my creative past with my recent corporate education in marketing. Incidentally, my first customers were former coworkers at Tropicana. As with all businesses, the startup was slow. I turned a guest bedroom into an office and focused on the first big job of designing displays for Tropicana Products that would be used in Walmart locations across the country.

Operating primarily on the generous severance cushion from my former employer, I didn't feel pressure to grow the business quickly. However, the time would come when that pressure would find its way into our home. To make some extra money, I worked for one of my best friends from college. He owned a large photography studio, and I helped him start what would be the beginning of a digital graphics department. I won't begin to explain the difference between what that meant in the late 1990s and today, but everything was moving along smoothly.

Then one day, a call came. My wife's boss was on the line, which was highly unusual. He had a very concerned tone in his voice. When I asked how he was doing, he told me he had some bad news to share. My wife had received a call from her brother informing her their mom had passed away unexpectedly. He asked that I come immediately because my wife was upset. When I arrived, my wife was sitting in her boss's office by herself, trying as best she could to grasp how her best friend was suddenly gone. As significant as that call was, we had no idea the impact it would have on our lives.

A few weeks passed, and Mother's Day was approaching. My wife said we should think about going to church that Sunday. Her mom was devoted to her church, and she thought it was a way we could honor her memory. I agreed, so we found a church that was part of the denomination I grew up in with an ideal start time: not too early and not too late. Perfect. We would have the rest of the day open. When we arrived, we were surprised to see that there was a praise band, which we had never experienced before. Also, to our surprise, one of the praise team members was someone I had worked closely with for years at Tropicana. We immediately felt at home.

Quickly, my wife and I got involved. We both joined the praise band right away. I was soon asked to mentor young teenage boys in a discipleship program called confirmation. It was a journey through the Bible and discussing what it meant to know Jesus. One of the program's strengths was the relationship between the students and their mentors. A one on one mentoring relationship that I would come to appreciate. Soon, I was asked to lead outreach and evangelism. All this was coming

quickly for someone who hadn't been to church in two decades. I later realized that these events would lead to a most unexpected pivot in my life. All I saw when in the midst of it was how, as I poured my time into the church, my business wasn't growing as I had hoped. I had one employee in addition to myself. Times were tough, and the company was having trouble making expenses.

Then one day, the call came. It was a former contractor who worked for me at Tropicana. She had a customer who needed design work for a new service they were about to launch. But they also wanted help marketing the service, which wasn't their strength. So she asked if I could come in as a subcontractor and help her with that part of the project. Of course, I was glad to have the opportunity and happily agreed.

As the project progressed, the owner of the company said that we had reached a point where he needed to bring in the CFO of the company to get input. The day came for our meeting, and when the CFO arrived, I was shocked to discover it was the former CFO of the company I worked for just before I was hired at Tropicana. What were the odds? It had been twelve years since we had laid eyes on one another. We would soon discover that God had dramatically changed both our lives over time, and our reunion was indeed not a coincidence. God had a plan!

Once the project's design phase was complete, I continued to work for the company as their marketing agency. That is when the unexpected happened. One day while in a meeting with the owner and the CFO, they asked me if I had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That question certainly caught me off guard. After ten years in a corporate workplace, I had yet to experience questions about my faith before in a business environment until now.

My response was, "Of course. I am a leader in my church, and I serve at the church in many different capacities." While they were not completely satisfied with that answer, we moved on with our meeting. However, they did not stop there. At our next meeting, the same question. Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? My answer was, "Don't worry. I'm good." This went on for several months. The owner was slightly laid back in his approach, while the CFO was direct. However, they never gave up, and neither did I in my response.

Even after months of this exchange, I didn't realize something was happening within me until, one day, there was another call of sorts. I was in the bathroom getting ready for work when I was convicted that I should surrender to God and His word completely. I felt I was holding back and had not allowed God's word to have full authority over my life. I decided I needed to pray the sinner's prayer I had publicly prayed when I was thirteen years old and recommit my life to Jesus Christ. So, I got on my knees at the foot of the bed, prayed that prayer, and once again surrendered my life to Jesus as Lord.

When I stood up, I was expecting something to happen. Nothing. I then went about getting ready for work and left it at that. The next day, I was in the bathroom getting ready for work, and the same conviction overcame me. So, I got on my knees at the foot of the bed and prayed the same prayer. Nothing. I went about getting ready for work and left it at that.

On the third day, I was in the bathroom getting ready for work, and it happened—the same conviction from the Holy Spirit. So, I got on my knees at the foot of the bed and prayed the same prayer I had prayed over the past two days. Still nothing. Like before, I went about my business, got ready for work, and headed to the office. However, the drive that day would change my life. On this third day, God did something remarkable.

After three days of praying that prayer, God revealed himself to me miraculously. As I turned the corner on my commute, I looked up at the sky and saw the face of Jesus. Sounds corny, I know, but Jesus can speak to us however He chooses. At that moment, I received the gift of faith. It was so overwhelming that God had removed all doubt, and I started yelling, “He’s real. He’s real,” as I tried to keep my car from running off the side of the road. It wasn’t until I surrendered to God that I no longer needed answers, and only then did God give me all the answers I would ever need.

I had such an overpowering encounter with the Holy Spirit that I have never looked back. My work with my clients changed. I began to understand my role of serving them from a ministry perspective. I found myself relating to my business in a different light. I was beginning to think about how my faith played a roll. I started to understand this event's significance in my life and what a gift I received in this divine encounter. Surprisingly, I was hesitant to share what had happened. Perhaps it was so unusual that I thought no one would believe me. It was several days before I slowly shared the experience, as it took time to allow what God did through the Son and Holy Spirit to sink in.

I do not believe that this was a “born again” moment, although I thought that for some time. However, I believe this was a revival in my life and relationship with Jesus Christ. It was a keen awareness of the Holy Spirit that dwells within those who, through their baptism, have a heightened awareness of the power that resides within. I don’t believe I had fallen from grace before that encounter. The Holy Spirit didn’t need a do-over. What God seals once is enough! This was, however, a moment when I fully surrendered my life to Jesus Christ, including all the baggage I picked up since I was thirteen along the way since I was thirteen. I began a season of looking ahead to where he was leading me instead of always looking back over my shoulder at where I had been. This was my answer to that question from my clients, “Do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ?” For the first time, I understood my response, “Absolutely, and it began when I accepted Jesus and was baptized at thirteen. It’s been a journey, Jesus was persistent by my side, and now it’s about to get exciting!”

Indeed, my business changed moving forward from this encounter. God started sending new clients who were Christian business owners and understood that God owned their companies; they were simply stewards of the gift God entrusted to them. I began to understand the term Marketplace Ministry. The church at work in and through the marketplace. In addition to traditional marketing, we supported clients in producing the materials to help them share Jesus with their customers. It was a new way of thinking for me, and I began to see my business more as a ministry than a marketing company I owned and controlled. I realized for the first time that I was never really in control of anything. I needed a better driver.

As I began to work for more Christian business owners, I recognized a common thread between them. They were focused, self-made, confident leaders, and telling them what they needed to do for their companies took work. After all, they were already successful, or they wouldn't have the resources to hire our company. However, I was able to lean on an important lesson I learned as a corporate contractor serving executives ten years earlier. Learn to listen carefully and observe with a posture of receiving. Don't assume anything; lean in with the customer's best interest in mind. What I discovered is that most strong business leaders know what they want. However, that often doesn't translate into what they need. A small business hires a marketing company because it has grown to the point where the company has exceeded the leader's skill sets. In turn, my sole job was to listen with the willingness to be changed by what I hear and blend my experience with the company's needs. That's it. My job isn't to tell the customer how to get what they want. My job is to tell the customer what they need. My most loyal partners were the leaders who allowed me to serve them that way.

Then one day, the call came. It was the CFO God was about to use once again to turn my life upside down. He told me that there was someone whom he wanted me to meet and asked that I come to his office to talk. When I arrived, I met a former pastor who shared that God sent him to Manatee County from Colorado. He didn't know why, but he and his wife wanted to be obedient, so they moved, trusting the Lord with the details. He went on to share that he got a word from God. He was called to lead a prayer movement that began in South Africa a few years earlier called The Global Day of Prayer. The event took place every year on Pentecost Sunday around the globe. The CFO asked if I would serve on the team because of my media background. I said yes, not knowing where it would eventually lead. I would later learn that this person God put into my life was a former VP of Promise Keepers, a national men's movement that drew tens of thousands to stadiums across the country, and currently the president of The Center for Revival and Awakening. He became one of my closest mentors and still is today.

So, we planned the first event with a small band of people that God brought together: pastors, intercessory prayer warriors, a Christian radio station manager, and businesspeople. We didn't know how many would attend, but we felt God leading us to hold the event at our local civic center. It was a stretch to make that big of a commitment, but we put our trust in God to fill the space.

The event wouldn't involve any speakers. The whole three-hour event would be worship and prayers led by dozens of pastors and lay people. At the time, intercessory prayer was not even on my radar as a ministry God would call me to be involved in. I remember our first planning meeting. I felt so self-conscious. It was my first experience calling out to God passionately and urgently for His intervention. I was entirely out of my comfort zone, and here I was, a marketing company owner, sitting in a corporate conference room, praying for God to intercede in our planning. The imposter syndrome feeling I had was right where God wanted me.

It wasn't long before God began a series of interruptions. First, there was a Christian stewardship class taught at our church, so I decided to go. The course took place over a couple of days. The instructor was excellent. I was captivated by the biblical financial principles he shared.

When I got home after the last day of class, I decided to go through the budget worksheet. It was apparent that there was no way we could tithe with our mortgage. Over the following week, I was convicted by the Holy Spirit to make the changes necessary to return 10 percent of our income to God. My awareness of hearing the nudging of God was new to me as my relationship with the Holy Spirit began to grow. I talked to my wife about what I was hearing from God concerning tithing, so we decided to sell the house we were living in and downsize. This decision took trusting God with our security to a new level.

We sold our house several months later and found a smaller place that would allow us room in our finances to begin to meet our giving goal. But there was a catch. After several visits to a new community and on the verge of signing a contract, we discovered that it was a 55+ community. At the time, we were under that age by nearly two decades. We were told it didn't matter because they had to allow a certain percentage of owners under that age. However, one other rule in the community would require a great deal of consideration. In addition to being a 55+ community, there were no kids allowed. At the time, we did not have kids, and it was not something we had discussed up to that point, even though we had been married for ten years. While age was not the barrier, for the first time, we needed to think about whether children were to be part of our future. I was forty, and my wife was thirty-eight, so it wouldn't be long before having kids was no longer an option. We both agreed that we needed to go to the Lord and seek an answer for our lives together.

After much prayer, we both came together with the same discernment from the Lord. God had other plans for us as a couple than parenthood. My leadership in the church was expanding, and we felt God was telling us that there was a different path ahead that didn't include children. So, we agreed that kids were not part of God's plan for us, and we should go ahead and take steps to purchase a house in this community. So, that's what we did.

Then one day, the call came. We both heard the same voice. Three months after moving into the house we loved, we stood in the kitchen one afternoon and almost simultaneously said to one another, "I think we are supposed to have kids." God had answered our prayers with a voice through the Holy Spirit; it just didn't happen on our schedule.

Six months later, my wife shared the good news with me. We were pregnant! Our lives were about to be turned upside down again. Only half a year earlier, this wasn't even on our radar. We were sure God had other plans for us that wouldn't allow time for kids. I guess we were wrong. We started doing all the usual things like regular doctor visits, and discussing how our lives would change. It was an exciting time for us both. Three months passed, and it was time for a scheduled ultrasound. We were nervous when the nurse technician came in to do the procedure. We both were staring at the screen as she did the scan. Of course, we had no idea what we were looking at, but she patiently explained everything as she moved along. As I am sure she did for everyone. After several minutes of doing the scan, the nurse stopped and told us she was done. She then excused herself and said she would be right back. For those reading this who have gone through this, you probably know the feeling at that moment and remember the change of atmosphere in the room. When the nurse

returned, she brought in the doctor on call, who explained that our child had passed. I know how I felt then, but I don't even pretend to know what my wife felt. There are no words.

By this time, others knew that we were pregnant, so we began the difficult process of telling our family and friends what had happened. After everything we went through to get to this point, was this part of God's plan? Everyone rallied around us, especially our church family. We were trying to be brave, but as soon as our pastor found out, he knew we needed to talk this through. You did not move past this without dealing with the emotional toll this takes on you. Most surprising was the number of women we knew very well who approached my wife and told her they had gone through the same thing. That was a turning point for us in understanding how important it is to have a church family. We are not meant to live in isolation and go through things alone. This experience is a reminder of the miracle of childbirth and how perfectly things must come together in a woman's body to be ready to conceive, carry, and deliver a little human. It is a witness to a creator who never stops creating.

The healing process is complicated, as there are so many things a woman must go through after this happens. It's hard to properly grieve and move on during weeks of doctor visits, procedures, and self-doubt that remind you of losing a child you hadn't met but already loved. We decided not to give up, and after the time for healing, six months later, we were pregnant again. This time the story would have a different ending.

While at a routine checkup close to the delivery date, it was determined that my wife had begun to dilate. It was time. Even though this was nineteen years ago, I can still see my wife standing in the parking lot at the hospital, holding her pillow and looking a little nervous. Understandably so. My wife was in labor for twelve hours, and I was amazed she had that much strength. I stood by her side, holding her hand, encouraging her to keep pushing. I told her that she could do it while thinking to myself that there was no way she could do it! But, like countless mothers before her, she had the strength to deliver the miracle of a child. After our daughter was born, they whisked her to the table to clear her lungs.

While my poor wife finished birthing alone, I was now focused on other things. I was mesmerized watching the nurses care for our daughter when I heard a voice. It was the doctor saying over and over, "It's a miracle. It's a miracle." I turned around to see the doctor holding the umbilical cord. He was amazed to see that the cord was in a knot. He was in disbelief that the pregnancy did not have complications during the twelve hours of labor. When I saw the doctor later that morning, I asked him when the cord would have gotten into a knot. He told me it must have happened within the first three to four months of pregnancy. Beyond that time, the fetus becomes too large to spin around to allow that to happen. That was the breathtaking moment when my wife and I realized God was always in control of His plans for us. Our daughter was a miracle, and God made sure that we knew it! After our daughter was born, we decided it wouldn't be fair to remain living in a community designed to be kid-free. So, we sold our new home during a market upswing and bought a larger house than we had before the decision to downsize—and with a smaller mortgage.

With our decision to tithe, God made us parents with a larger home. In our obedience, God was faithful.

As the years went by, I served the customers of our marketing company, served others in my church, and served on the planning team for the National Day of Prayer event, and learned how to be a dad. Everything seemed just as God had planned. I understood serving through Marketplace Ministry and its call on my life. I was right where God wanted me. At least, that is what I thought. Then came the year 2008, a year that many small business owners will never forget. Everything that I thought I knew suddenly didn't make sense at all. Small poor business decisions over the years grew to become big problems. Things were about to change and what seemed to be the worst years was a step towards something completely unexpected.

Leading in my church, I regularly attended our denomination's Annual Conference. One year, while attending an ordination service, I heard a different call, only this time, I didn't answer. The ordination service was one of my favorite parts of the Annual Conference. There was something special about it. I could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit as those whom God called submitted their lives to serve the church through pastoral vocation.

Watching the ceremony, I was moved by the commitment of all who took the stage to be prayed over and commissioned by the bishop. Following the ordination service, there is a tradition that the presiding bishop ends the event with an altar call for those who hear the call into pastoral ministry. I will never forget how I felt that year as I watched those called walking toward the stage. I had an overwhelming conviction of the Holy Spirit that I was supposed to go forward that night to the altar. It took everything that I could do to keep from getting up. What kept me from making that trip down the aisle that night was hearing from the Holy Spirit that this was not just about me. It had to be a call answered by the whole family. So, I stayed in my seat, knowing what God wanted me to do that night. This was not over, God told me. It was just the beginning.

At our next planning meeting for The Global Day of Prayer, I shared with the team where God was leading me. Their response surprised me. Instead of being happy for me, they were upset. How could I leave Marketplace Ministry, where God's people were genuinely doing Kingdom work? Frankly, I didn't have an answer, but I would later understand that is usually how God works.

After their shock wore off, they were reminded of the decision to move the prayer event to a location in nearby DeSoto County in three years. A hundred and fifty years earlier, this location was once the Manatee County seat, in the center of what now consists of eight counties. When it was discovered that the county was originally more extensive, we felt God telling the team that the original Manatee County was what God had in mind all along. We were thinking too small. God had planned something only God could do. Across the street from the historic landmark where the county seat once stood, is a church planted a century and a half ago. It just so happened that the church was the same denomination I was a part of, so the joke of the day was that I would become the pastor of that church forty miles away, sitting in a rural part of the state. As ridiculous as it was, it would remain the inside joke of the team for the next three years.

Two years went by, and on the fifth year of holding the prayer event at the convention center, there were over 3,500 people gathered to cry out to God. Around the globe, the event grew to over half a billion people. Preparations were now being made to hold the event at a new location. The church across the street of the former courthouse founded in 1868 in the middle of orange groves and cattle pastures. A church that was then the center of the county God called us to. The pastor was delighted to participate and support us in any way he could. While researching its history, it was revealed that there were stories of a great revival that took place there. It was said that great balls of fire were seen in the sky as people came from everywhere to worship and praise God for what was taking place. Years later, I would get confirmation from a gentleman who told me his grandmother spoke of what had happened.

The plan was to have the phone company set up a special high-speed line to the internet. Instead of inviting only two counties to the civic center, we would broadcast the event to churches across the eight counties of what we were now calling the OMC or the Original Manatee County. Those leading prayer and worship would be at the church for the streaming event. This was years before streaming was an expectation. At that time, this was a significant undertaking by our small team. The internet connection was arranged as well as the usual radio promotions. Churches were also getting on board, and those with the technical capability agreed to be host churches in the surrounding counties. Everything was falling into place.

Then one day, the call came. We were two weeks away from Pentecost Sunday, and the event was all set. When I answered the phone, I heard the pastor of the historic church on the other side. I assumed he was calling to get an update and tell me everything was ready on their end. However, unfortunately, that was far from the case. He told me we would have to cancel the event because he was leaving the church due to conflicts. I was speechless except to tell him how sorry I was and that we would pray for him and his wife. In shock, I called the other leaders to tell them what had happened. So many plans had been made and the radio advertising was already on air. How could we stop at this point? So, I did the only thing I could think of: call the church. When I called, I explained who I was and what I had just heard from their pastor. I asked if there was anything we could do to hold the event at their church still. She told me she was glad I called and would put me in touch with one of their lay leaders.

A meeting was arranged with me, the CFO, and the pastor who started it all to discuss our options. He was very gracious and told us that it would be no problem for us to hold the event as planned. He was familiar with the event because we asked him, as a representative from his church, to lead one of the prayers the previous year. The meeting went exceptionally well, and we ended it in prayer, thanking God for seeing this through with us. What could have become a scramble and perhaps an enormous letdown became a witness of the Holy Spirit working in all of this and the faithfulness of God. It was falling into place, and everything was back as we had expected. Or so it seemed.

Then, the following week, the call came. The district superintendent from our denomination called me. Since I was going through the candidacy process to become a pastor, I had several meetings

with the superintendent in our area. However, this call was more than unexpected. He asked me how I was doing, and without much delay, he told me that he wanted to appoint me as the lead pastor of a historic church about forty miles east of us. Yes, the church that just lost its pastor. Yes, the church that the team had been joking about for three years that I would one day pastor. Yes, the church where we were about to hold our prayer event. Yes, the most outrageous possibility that could be imagined, God had imagined long ago. When I hung up the phone, I was in shock. I fell to my knees, crying in disbelief, praising God. I hadn't even finished my candidacy and was appointed to a church that would be a central prayer hub for eight counties for years to come. God had done the unthinkable.

A few days later, we held the prayer event on Pentecost Sunday: three hours of prayer and worship filled with the Holy Spirit. For me, it was another reminder of how big and present our God is all the time. Four days after the event, it was official. I became the lead pastor of that historic church. God is good!

Hearing the Call.

If there is one thing Jesus does exceptionally well, it is interrupting our lives when we least expect it. But that comes as no surprise, as it is precisely how the story begins with those whom we now know as the first disciples in the Gospels. "Drop your nets and leave your business behind. Come, follow me. I can't tell you where we are going, but I will show you what it means to live as a disciple along the way." These, of course, are my words summarizing what we read in Matthew 4:18-22. The process was to hear, listen, trust, respond, and learn. What was not said was to meet me tomorrow so we can study and plan a time to serve. No, it was, "follow me, and everything we do from this moment on will be the life of a disciple that I command you to teach others to do the same," as instructed in Matthew 28:19-20. In his book, *I Am a Follower*, Leonard Sweet, speaker, prolific author, and professor of Portland Seminary's doctoral program "Semiotics, Church, and Culture," and who I am grateful to call a friend and mentor, writes, "Jesus called his disciples to 'follow me,' but he didn't tell them where they were going."

Complacency stops the journey of following Jesus on the way. There are seasons of my life where I let the phone go to voicemail because I didn't want to hear about the next interruption on the horizon. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, described as a pastor, martyr, prophet, and spy during WWII, states in his book *Life Together*, "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions. We may pass them by, preoccupied with our more important tasks, as the priest passed by the man who had fallen among thieves, perhaps—reading the Bible."¹⁶

As I entered this season, it became apparent that my seasons of life seemed to correspond to my vocation. Christian or not, our work drives our perceived circumstances and expectations.

¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 78.

Unfortunately, our perspective of work often gets wrapped up in financially driven desires. Timothy Keller, esteemed author and pastor, comments on the lament of work as labor under the sun toiled in grief and pain in Ecclesiastes 2:22-23, "This is the experience of the person whose soul is resting wholly on the circumstances of their work."¹⁷ This error occurs when we view our faith as something in addition to our other life domains, such as health, family, and finance, as discussed in earlier chapters.

Author and professor of theology at Whitworth University, Gerald Sittser, writes, "Christians did not accommodate to Rome. Neither did they isolate from Rome. Instead, they immersed themselves in the culture as followers of Jesus and agents of the kingdom, influencing it from within both as individuals and as a community."¹⁸ During a phone interview with me, Dr. Sittser further shared that it's about "who you are when you are not practicing religion."¹⁹ Work is a missional pursuit to see not as just an opportunity to share our faith but as an opportunity to live out our faith. It is not a call to bring Jesus to the world. Our mission is to join God, who is already in the world.

The church has fallen into a dependency on seeing discipleship as a process of equipping God's people to grow God's Kingdom, where we become the center of making that happen. Leonard Sweet eloquently states in his book, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There*, "A lot of times (read: most of the time) we are praying for things that God has already given us. 'Open your eyes and look at the fields ... ripe for harvest.' God has already given us the fields we need for our mission. We need to be nudged to 'open our eyes and look.'"²⁰ God doesn't need us; God chooses us. It's all God's already. The Kingdom of God is not something we grow. The Kingdom of God is everything we know.

I have often repeated a phrase that I heard early in my faith journey: the church is the hope of the world. While it may be a move forward from making me the center, it still falls short of the truth. Jesus is the hope of the world. It has always been Jesus. We don't make it so. Our mission is to be seers who help others see what is already there. We often question the need for Jesus to touch the blind man twice to heal him, as recorded in Mark 8:24, "The man looked around. 'Yes,' he said, 'I see people, but I can't see them very clearly. They look like trees walking around.'" Why do we

¹⁷ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 104.

¹⁸ Gerald L. Sittser, *Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 174.

¹⁹ Dr. Gerald Sittser. Interview by author. Phone. November 2, 2022.

²⁰ Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There*, New edition (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010), 220-221.

assume Jesus didn't heal him the first time? Len Sweet states in *Nudge*, "But there were two separate healings here."²¹

What we are missing is asking how Jesus healed the blind man the first time. What should we be seeing? Sweet reminds us that Jesus wasn't just showing us what to do. He showed us how to see. "Semiotics is an attempt to get our eyes off the chalkboard and into the real world. It is the art of making connections, linking disparate dots, seeing the relationships between apparently trifling matters, and turning them into metonymic moments."²² This passage in Mark describes Jesus healing the man so that he sees both the micro and macro worlds. Before the blind man sees the person in front of him, he sees the forest of trees. Your mission is part of my Father's Kingdom, Jesus is showing us. We must disciple others to see the forest around us semiotically and not get overwhelmed by the trees.

This chapter and season highlight the value of listening and the discipleship domain of mission. These two topics are vital in this post-pandemic era. They are in direct relation to our call to follow Jesus Christ. They are related because our mission begins with hearing the call. However, to listen to the call means we first must be aware of the caller and willing to respond to what we hear. Os Guinness, born in China to medical missionaries, author, and graduate of the Universities of London and Oxford, states in his book *The Call*, "Responding to the call means rising to the challenge, but in conversation and in partnership—and in an intimate relationship between the called and the Caller."²³ Guinness additionally states, "Humanness is a response to God's calling."²⁴ To be on mission at work and play means embracing the missional value of listening. The mission is not about doing more. The mission is about being more human.

As a young person undergoing several surgeries on my ear, I spent countless times in a hearing test booth. It can be a little intimidating if you have never been in one, especially when young. It resembles a vault with a massive thick door and a small double-pane window. When you step in and sit in the chair, the technician puts a headset on your head, then walks out and swings the vault door shut. You are now sealed in a box that is entirely soundproof with foam on the walls, so any sound you make is immediately silenced. Next, the technician turns the large dials to play a tone in one of your ears. You are instructed to use your fingers to indicate if you hear the tone. The tones change in frequency and get softer and softer until you can no longer hear them. It sounds easy, but when the tones get very low, there reaches a point when you are not sure if you heard it or just

²¹ Sweet, *Nudge*, 220.

²² Sweet, *Nudge*, 41.

²³ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling God's Purpose for Your Life*, Expanded, Revised, Anniversary edition (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 53.

²⁴ Guinness, *The Call*, 52.

imagined it. You start to second-guess yourself. Is the tone playing in your head without the machine?

Then the test moves on to playing words. You then repeat the words into a microphone. When the words become very soft, you must stop focusing on what you hear and shift to listening. It is only through listening that you can distinguish the syllables. You find yourself holding your breath and leaning in to repeat the words you hear. But that is a struggle if you are not taking steps to listen. Listening takes a great deal of concentration and focus. The energy to listen is much greater than the effort to hear.

The value of learning the effort and focus required to listen to others becomes missional. Imagine what would happen to our ability to share the love of Jesus if we trusted what we know as truth in God's word enough to put our agenda on hold, lean in and listen to others regardless of their beliefs and be willing to be changed by what we hear? God is big enough to protect us from false teaching but personal enough to speak to us through others. We must push through simply hearing into the act of listening. To hold our breath if necessary so we could repeat what is said. To be willing to be altered by what is said. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, leaders of Barna Research and Q, write in their book *Good Faith*, "Good conversations demand active listening, mental and emotional engagement, openness to the possibility that we're wrong, and empathy to see the situation from the other person's point of view."²⁵

There must be peace with the vulnerability to trust the nudging we hear from the voice within and we must listen with a willingness to be changed by what we hear. As God showed me in my business, learn to listen carefully and observe with a posture of receiving. By understanding others' wants and desires, we can help them see the joy of Jesus supplying their needs. Where we do it, according to Acts 1:8, is everywhere. In our backyard, our schools, our workplace, the gym, around people that make us feel uncomfortable, and anywhere we go around the globe. These aren't places that need us to bring Jesus. These are the places where Jesus wants us to catch up and follow Him there. We aren't bringing Jesus; Jesus is bringing us! It's not about us; it's about Jesus.

Prior to becoming a lead pastor, I became a bi-vocational pastor serving as both business owner and assistant pastor. Some suggested that I should become a full-time pastor. While I imagine now that may have been a word from God at the time, I hesitated to agree. Traditionally, demonstrating a gift for leadership in the church leads to the logical next step of becoming a pastor. Os Guinness writes, "The truth of calling means that for followers of Christ, "everyone, everywhere, and in everything" lives the whole of life as a response to God's call."²⁶ He further states, "Ponder, for

²⁵ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Good Faith: Being a Christian When Society Thinks You're Irrelevant and Extreme*, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 17.

²⁶ Guinness, *The Call*, 62.

example, the fallacy of the contemporary Protestant term full-time Christian service—as if those not working for churches or Christian organizations are only part-time in the service of Christ.”²⁷ To think of discipleship as a series of steps that eventually get awarded by leadership in the church is to deny the majority of leadership God is doing outside the church.

In his book *The Other Six Days*, R. Paul Stevens, author, Professor Emeritus in Marketplace Theology, Regent College, Vancouver, BC, and Chairman of the Institute for Marketplace Transformation, states, “The Christian vocation summons us to take up the human vocation in its totality. We are not redeemed by Christ to become angels preparing for an immaterial heaven, but saved to become fully human beings serving God and God’s purposes in the world through the church.”²⁸ When someone says they don’t feel called into ministry or don’t know where they are called, the biblical response should be a question, “Where do you work?” Because that’s where Jesus spends most of His time. Instead of asking, “Where am I called to go?” know that you are already there and ask, “How am I called where I am?” Marketplace Ministry isn’t business doing church; it’s the church doing business. Our work is the mission.

Do you hear God calling? Then lean in, hold your breath, and listen. Jesus is waiting for your response. He isn’t calling you to pull away from the world; He is calling you into the world. So, follow Jesus into the marketplace with the power of the Holy Spirit and work in it!

Sample Small Group Questions

1. Who do you find it most difficult to listen to and why?
2. What do you find difficult about listening with a willingness to be changed by what you hear?
3. How might putting the other person first in a conversation look to you?
4. What steps can you take now to see yourself on mission at your workplace outside of sharing your faith?

²⁷ Guinness, *The Call*, 62.

²⁸ R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective*, First Paperback Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 88.

The Website: Kingdom Without Walls

SAMPLE PAGES

While the primary focus of this project is the book *Crossing the Jordan Together*, the overarching goal is to give churches and Jesus-followers the resources to take what was learned and implement it. Offering a way to take action makes the opportunity for change seamless. Coaching may be necessary for many church leaders and pastors, as all churches are not at the same point in their vitality and growth. In some cases, culture change may need to be addressed. In other instances, intentional discipleship may be nonexistent. Conversely, longstanding programs may already exist. In some cases, a thriving church may be experiencing the post-pandemic disengagement of attendees in their former commitment to volunteerism, thus impacting the vital need to express hospitality during Sunday gatherings.²⁹

The foundation work has been developed and is live online as a fully functional website, although, at the writing of this document, it is not complete or actively promoted. The domain name purchased and launched as part of this project is www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church. While the website is live at this time, samples of the website are included in Figures 15-22 below. The final website navigation will align with the overall strategy behind supporting churches and local Christian communities with information and resources for Kingdom Living, as outlined in the book. In addition to the static content pages, the website is built with a blog database to serve as an ongoing way to provide new content and provide statistical trends, encouraging fresh ideas supporting Kingdom Living.

The book and the website work in tandem to provide common ground for churches to work together that previously may have struggled to find a mutually understood language based on their cultural differences. The website, by offering online coaching and support to diverse pastor and church leader groups engaging together in the recoding of discipleship, supports stretching assumptions for re-engaging regular attenders and seekers in the life of the church both inside and outside its walls.

The website and book cover artwork were developed during the research phase of this project. Therefore, these hours are not captured as part of the final project. All artwork, logos, icons, body copy, quotes, and taglines are original and developed for this project. The website homepage incorporates an image of a lion, tying into the reference in the book of Revelation 5:5 as a metaphor for Jesus. The icons, coloring, and logo are designed to be appealing to both Christians as laity and corporate businesspeople. Thus, blending the lion and smiling faces with corporate-style icons is intentional to appeal to a broad audience.

²⁹ Gallup Inc, "U.S. Charitable Donations Rebound; Volunteering Still Down," Gallup.com, January 11, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/388574/charitable-donations-rebound-volunteering-down.aspx>.



FIGURE 15: KINGDOMWITHOUTWALLS.CHURCH HOME A

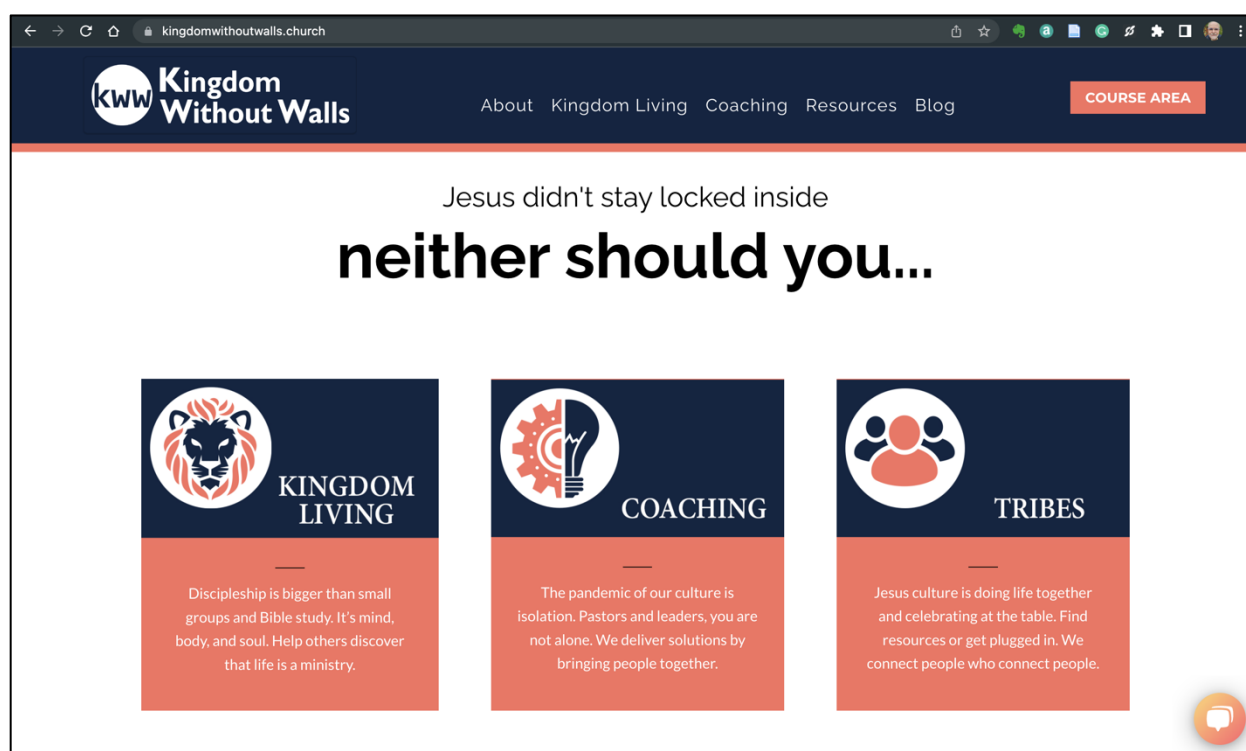


FIGURE 16: KINGDOMWITHOUTWALLS.CHURCH HOME B

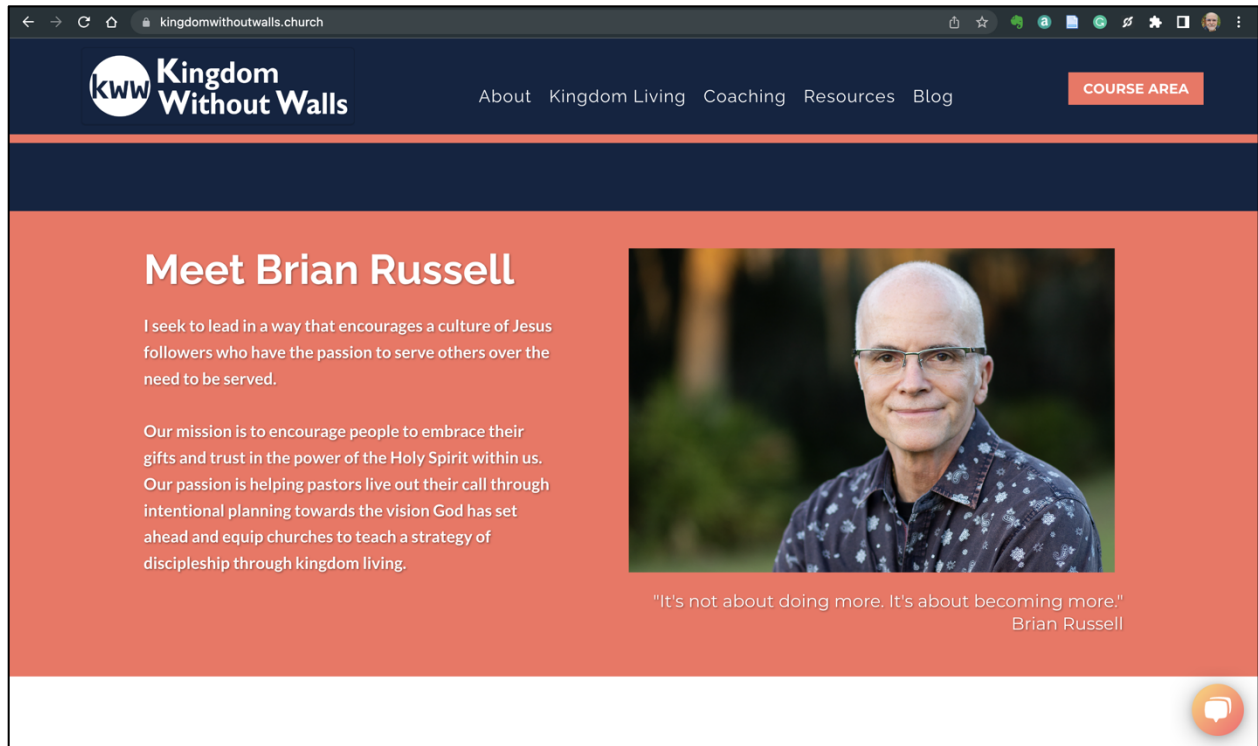


FIGURE 17: KINGDOMWITHOUTWALLS.CHURCH HOME C

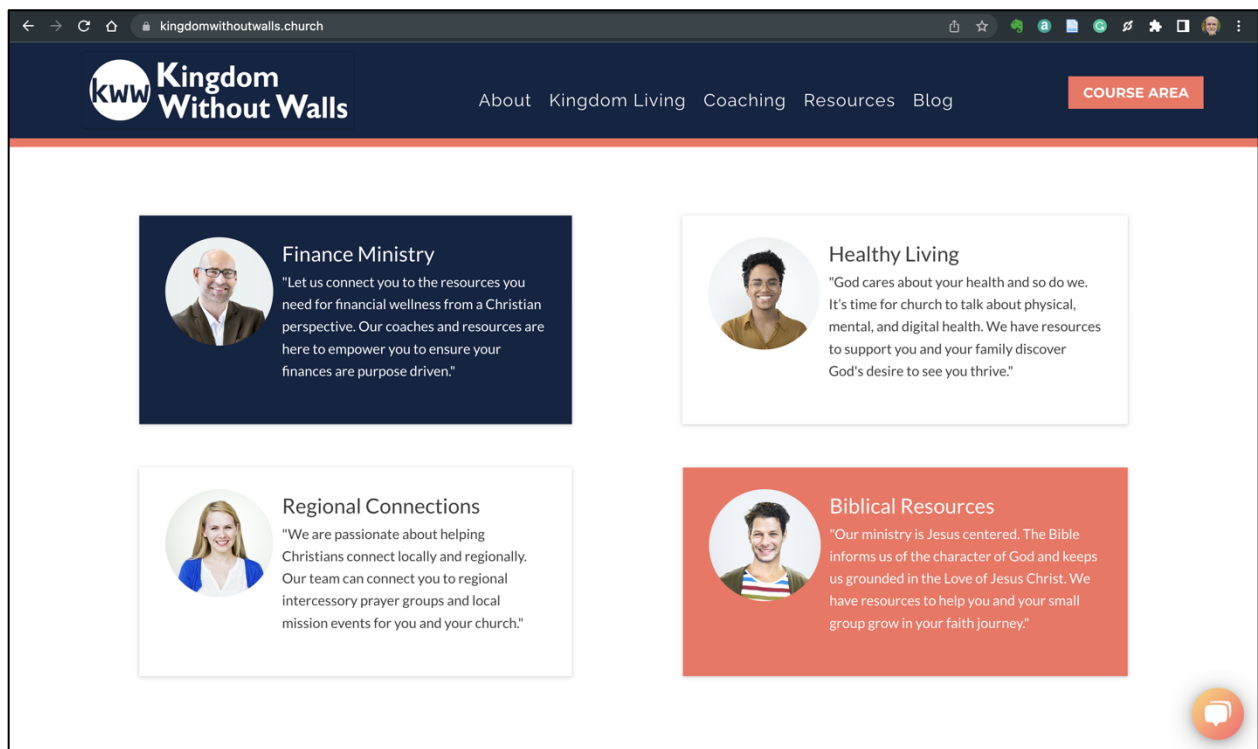


FIGURE 18: KINGDOMWITHOUTWALLS.CHURCH HOME D



FIGURE 19: KINGDOMWITHOUTWALLS.CHURCH KINGDOM LIVING A

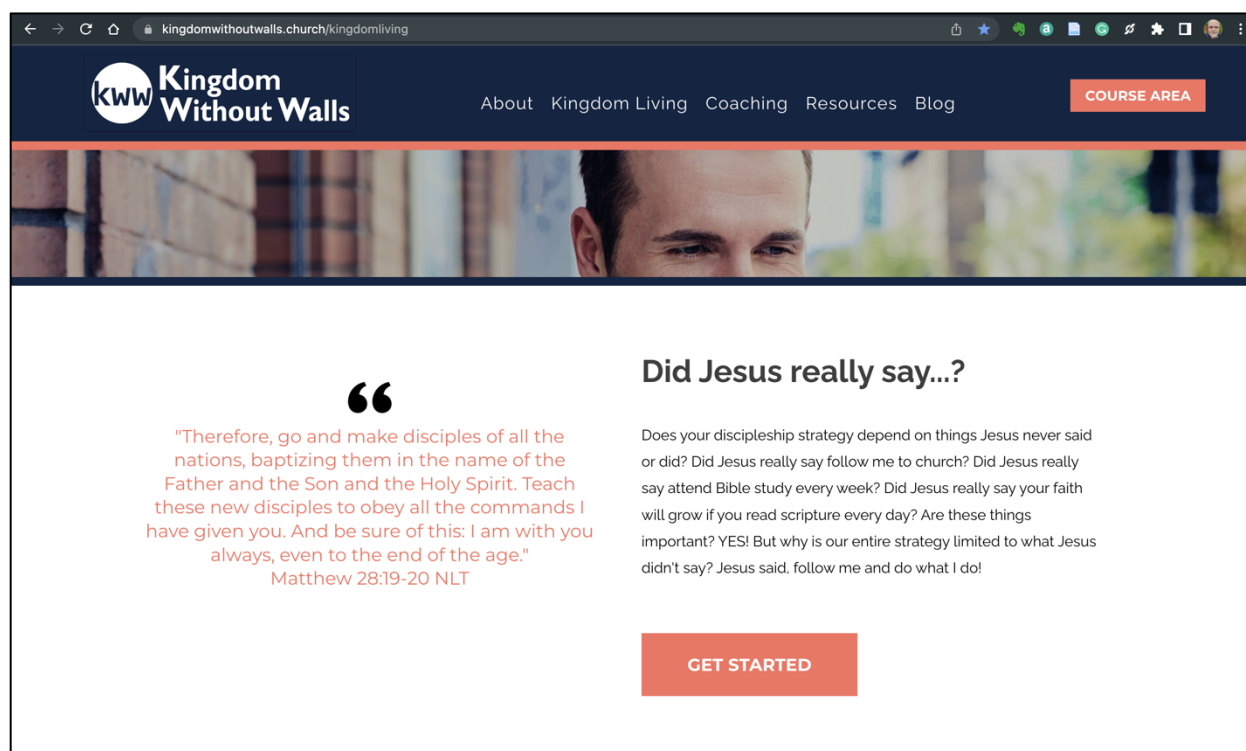


FIGURE 20: KINGDOMWITHOUTWALLS.CHURCH KINGDOM LIVING B

kingdomwithoutwalls.church/kingdomliving

Kingdom Without Walls

About Kingdom Living Coaching Resources Blog **COURSE AREA**

When did Faith become a slice of Life?

Faith isn't a piece, it's the whole pie! Too often churches lead with the expectation that discipleship focuses on regular church attendance and Bible Study in small groups alone. We are hesitant to hold others accountable for other life domains. Mission isn't an event; we live in mission. Service isn't an activity, it's an outward witness of becoming Christlike in our church, our work, our marriages, our families and beyond. Health and Finance are not reserved for our personal lives. God desires those domains too!

GET STARTED

FIGURE 21: KINGDOMWITHOUTWALLS.CHURCH KINGDOM LIVING C

kingdomwithoutwalls.church/kingdomliving

Kingdom Without Walls

About Kingdom Living Coaching Resources Blog **COURSE AREA**

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"Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

Acts 2:37 NLT

"All the believers were together and had everything in common."

Acts 2:44 NIV

It's discipleship through Kingdom Living!

Jesus didn't choose teachers and scholars to be disciples. Jesus chose businesspeople and an accountant to do ministry in the marketplace. In turn, the disciples modeled the teaching of Jesus and did the same. At the birth of the church people worshiped, studied, discussed finance, and looked out for each other's health. They followed Jesus with their daily lives!

GET STARTED

FIGURE 22: KINGDOMWITHOUTWALLS.CHURCH KINGDOM LIVING D

Assessment

To assess the project during the development process, emails were sent to seventeen stakeholders to participate in a survey to review and respond with feedback on project materials. Stakeholders included directors of hospitality and assimilation ministries at a megachurch with 12,000 attending weekly, pastors of mainline denominations, pastors of small non-denominational churches, church lay leaders, Christian counselors, and Christian business owners of multi-million-dollar businesses. Fifteen stakeholders responded by completing an online survey after completing the following instructions.

1. Review this webpage for a concept overview at <https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church/kingdomliving>
2. Open the Book PDF (47-page sample) at <https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church/crossingthejordantogether>
3. Read the Prologue
4. Read the Introduction
5. Review the Cover
6. Review the Summaries for Chapters 1-3, 5-7
7. Read Chapter 4
8. Review the Website homepage and hover over navigation at the top <https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church>
9. Complete Survey at https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church/thesis_survey

Several surveyed also participated in workshops and previous surveys over the past two years as part of this project. The book prologue and introduction provided the background for the NPO and the big idea for the project. Survey questions were designed to align with benchmark measurements for this project phase. Providing a name was optional at the end of the survey. Part one of the survey consisting of four questions and an open-text response focused on the NPO and the big idea for the project. Part two of the survey consisted of five questions and an open-text answer focused on the quality and effectiveness of the project materials. Part three of the survey allowed stakeholders to include additional comments on the material.

Feedback overall was positive and encouraging. One of the most surprising observations was the detail in which the material was reviewed. Through the survey or conversations following in person, several stakeholders asked detailed questions about the ideas presented in chapter four, which comprised twenty-five pages.

The following benchmarks were established to assess the project's critical success during research conducted in the project design phase. Questions asked in the survey were written so that the results would address each benchmark directly or indirectly. For benchmarks 1 and 4, multiple questions were asked to provide insight.

Benchmark 1. Book objective of providing a solution to NPO approval of at least 80%.

100% of stakeholders agreed there is value in offering discipleship strategies targeting multiple life domains in a post-Christendom culture beyond occasional church events and programs.

100% of stakeholders agreed that there is value in helping people understand that their faith life is not separate from the other domains of their life.

100% of stakeholders agreed that the book, with its supporting website, provides churches practical tools to reestablish relationships with post-pandemic disengaged Christians and seekers by offering a fresh proposal of discipleship as thriving holistic living in multiple life domains.

Benchmark 2. Quality of book cover art concept approval of at least 80%.

80% of stakeholders agreed that the design and concept of the book cover art meet the expectations for publishing today.

Benchmark 3. The direction of the chapter outlines, and small group sample questions approval of at least 80%.

100% of stakeholders agreed that the direction of the book chapter objectives communicated through story and sample questions could effectively engage pastors and church leaders relationally by opening up personal stories of their own.

Benchmark 4. The direction of chapter four meeting expectations approval of at least 80%.

100% of stakeholders agreed that communicating through personal testimony effectively illustrates discipleship as God moving in and through our lives.

100% of stakeholders agreed that chapter four meets expectations for the vision and direction of the book.

Benchmark 5. Marketing and resource support website for the book approval of at least 80%.

100% of stakeholders agreed that the website meets expected quality standards for marketing and resource support for the book's objectives.

Additional Learning.

100% of stakeholders agreed that an opportunity exists to bring people together by working on something new that requires innovative input from everyone where no one is the perceived expert.

ADJUSTMENTS DUE TO FEEDBACK

As a result of feedback from the surveys and open-text box responses, the following changes were made. All open-text box responses are attached in Appendix B.

Cover Art. Since the response to the cover art was not overwhelming, slight adjustments were made. First, the title art was given a more modern multi-layered shadow treatment. To maintain a simple color palette, the original river color was green. The final version was later changed to make the river color blue, and a simple water texture was added. While the responses met the benchmarks, the cover could proceed as-is; however, prior to publication, additional feedback and review will be assessed.

Introduction Chapter. One of the open-text box responses suggested that the introduction chapter was long and repetitive. This chapter was written before the additional chapters for prior surveys. Thus, its current version includes more of an overview than needed. However, the decision is to reframe, pulling content out at this time, since it will later move to more relevant chapters.

Mobile Version of Website. One stakeholder observed that the mobile version of the website was not displaying correctly on all pages. This is important feedback and will be reviewed during the final website development.

Additional Learning. The unanimous positive response to the opportunity in bringing people together by working on something new that requires innovative input from everyone where no one is the perceived expert is significant. Prior surveys before the post-pandemic period addressing the benefit were not unanimous. This was particularly the case with the large, thriving churches. This overwhelming response addressing the initial NPO during the discovery phases supports the positive change to the final NPO in addressing multiple opportunities.

While finalizing the work on this project, it was determined that the word “framing” was inadequate in expressing the desired outcome. The word framing denotes putting a new frame on the same picture. The objective of this project is to go beyond what has been done before. The conversation on discipleship doesn’t just need new answers; it needs new questions. Therefore, the NPO statement has been changed to substitute the word framing with “recoding” to reflect the intended concept of changing the language to reach a different picture of what it means to follow Jesus.

Project Launch Plan

Doctoral Project Description

NPO STATEMENT: The post-pandemic era leaves many Christians, and seekers unmotivated to re-engage with the church. Reconnection is possible by recoding discipleship as thriving, holistic devotional living.

This project focuses on re-engaging church attendees by recoding the language of discipleship to be practiced as holistic, incarnate Christian living and identifies the scriptural basis for surrendering one's life spiritually, physically, and financially to Jesus Christ. To accomplish this, the project consists of both a book and a website. The book establishes the why and is presented through the lens of a life story as a metaphor for discipleship. It creatively challenges pastors, church leaders, and laity to think beyond Bible study in small groups as the complete model for discipleship. The book introduces a new paradigm of discipleship that connects spirituality with all life's domains. Each chapter will include questions to facilitate small group engagement. The website provides the resources for churches and laity to implement what is discussed in the book. Additionally, the website offers coaching cohorts for pastors and church leaders to participate in fresh thinking in a post-pandemic season where no one is the expert.

Audience

The audience for this project is pastors and church leaders serving diverse churches of all sizes, both denominational and non-denominational. Additionally, the book will be written to engage both church leaders and non-leaders to use as a vehicle to roll out to small groups for church-wide application and training. The website will provide resources and support to both church leadership and laity to provide continuing education and support.

Development Plan

The Book: Crossing the Jordan Together

- Approximately 256 pages
- Seven chapters plus prologue and introduction
- Estimated size parameter: 5.25 x 8.38 in.
- Format: Paperback
- 80 lb. text, perfect binding, satin
- 100 lb. cover, satin, 4-color

BOOK DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

Below in Table 1 is the development and production roadmap for the book describing key assessments as the process progresses.

TABLE 1: BOOK PLAN

	Schedule	Key Assessment
<i>Cover Design</i>	May - Hire a designer to draft a potential alternate version	Poll 12 church leaders for feedback on two versions
<i>Writing</i>	May-Jul - Complete writing of six remaining chapters The target is one chapter every two weeks	Choose 3-4 people within targeted audience to provide feedback as chapters are completed prior to submitting to editor
<i>Editing</i>	May-Jul - Submit chapters to the editor as they are completed Aug 1-15 - Incorporate feedback from the editor	
<i>Short Run</i>	Aug 16-31 - \$500 for a short run of 50 paperback books to be used in benchmarking with church leaders	Month of Sep - Provide short-run book copies to 30-40 church leaders and laity for review and poll interest in a small group use
<i>Publishing</i>	Aug 1-15 - Test readability score on readable.com Obtain ISBN number and Copyright the book	
<i>Promotion</i>	Month of Sep - Promote pre-sale of the book on social media and email during the short-run review period	Evaluate interest through the download of PDF White Paper on the challenges of re-engaging church attenders in post-pandemic by posturing recoding discipleship as a solution
<i>Feedback</i>	Sep 25-30 - Incorporate Short-Run feedback changes	
<i>Printing</i>	Oct - Print on demand or bulk run	Printing process is to be determined based on response during the promotion period

The Website: Kingdom Without Walls

- www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church
- Hosted with dynamic web page design features
- Blog database features
- Membership area with login
- Built-in customer service contact widget
- Funnel page marketing features

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

Below in Table 2 is the development and production roadmap for the website describing key assessments as the process progresses.

TABLE 2: WEBSITE PLAN

	Schedule	Key Assessment
<i>Website</i>	Complete: Base design, navigation structure, blog integration, customer service widget	100% of 15 stakeholders surveyed stated that the website meets quality standards for marketing and resource support for the book's objectives
<i>Page Design</i>	May-Jul - Develop website pages by life domain as book chapters are written and edited	
<i>Membership</i>	Month of Aug - Develop membership area to prepare for group coaching	Month of Sep - Assess interest in coaching during short-run review period
<i>Blog Posts</i>	Month of Sep - Develop blog posts for several life domains	
<i>Coaching</i>	Complete: Coaching tools established: Zoom.com, Fellow.app	Zoom - Video Conferencing Fellow.app - Agenda & Goal Tracking
<i>Facebook</i>	Month of Aug - Develop Facebook groups: Kingdom Without Walls, Crossing The Jordan Together	Month of Sep - Make Facebook groups available to participants of short-run reviews for feedback engagement
<i>Promotion</i>	Month of Sep - Promote presale of book	Assess book subject interest through downloads of whitepaper

Development Process

Quality Benchmarks & Continuous Improvement

- One month before the printing date, at least 12 church leaders will provide feedback on the cover design of *Crossing the Jordan Together*, indicating that the design is high-quality and appropriate for book objectives.
- One month before the printing date, 80% of those surveyed will agree that the supporting website www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church is a great support website for promoting the book and providing additional resources for churches on discipleship.
- At least five pastors/church leaders commit to a four-month bi-weekly small group reading the book *Crossing the Jordan Together* as a brainstorming tool on reframing discipleship.
- At least six church lay members will commit to a three-month weekly small group study on discipleship using the book *Crossing the Jordan Together*.
- Through a completion survey, pastors/church leaders' small group will indicate at least an 80% positive response to the experience of discussing reframing discipleship as a model for re-engaging the disengaged in the church.
- Receive 10+ 4-5 star reviews on the book with permission to publish on a website.
- Intended audience will find the book *Crossing the Jordan Together* easily readable. Each chapter will be evaluated using ReadablePro Reports. Since this material is for general usage for church leaders and lay members, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level should be 5.0-8.0, and the Flesch Reading Ease score of 60 or higher.
- Experience a 50% growth in website engagement between four months after launch and eight months after launch. Engagement will be measured by using Google Analytics.

Appendix A— Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

Personal Research Manifesto

I seek to endure to lead my project with a posture of humility that ensures an outcome beyond my perception of truth working in a way that fuels cooperation and benefits the stakeholders.

NPO Statement

There exists new churches less than 20 years old with a heart for equipping older historical churches over 40 years old for transformational ministry whose efforts are inhibited by the cultural age gap separated by both praxis and mission expectations.

NPO Scope and Constraints

The anticipated outcome of my Doctor of Ministry Project would be to develop and write a book that presents a way to build bridges between new and historical church leaders through a personal experience narrative. What is the journey that leads to the development of tension and suspicion between churches established two decades ago and four or more decades ago? The solution may include both a book and a workshop made available to church leadership gatherings focusing on relationships and healing rather than church programs and processes. The costs would be minimal and expected to be limited to printing for workshop materials if determined necessary.

NPO Context

The NPO context includes churches both denominational and non-denominational. Its focus is looking at specifically cultural differences between newer churches and historical churches over 40 years old. For research purposes, I will focus primarily on large newer churches and smaller historical churches. Average age of congregation will not be a determining factor, but it is estimated that age of congregation may play a role. However, it is my intention to go into the research without that prejudice. The outcome of this project could impact both clergy and laity of both old and new church cultures. It is estimated based on the workshop and interviews that socio economics do not play a role in the factors between the cultural gap. Neither urban or rural churches nor wealthy or poor churches appear to play a role in their willingness to work together between church cultures based on established age of church.

Root Causes

The root cause of my NPO goes beyond church size. It is not caused by theological differences between denominational borders, nor does it appear to be a gap in worship styles. After several hours of engagement between clergy and laity representing both categories of new churches and older historic churches, the gap in communication appears to be differences in the cultural DNA of how churches first opened their doors. This causes a language barrier that over the years has led to false assumptions between the two identified church categories. These assumptions over the

years has resulted in mutual pain, fear, mistrust, and brokenness. While it may be assumed that the hurt exists only with the older historic churches towards the newer large churches, my workshop and interviews indicate that not to be the case. There is apparent hurt, and mistrust experienced on both sides of these two groups.

Discovery Workshop Stakeholders

The stakeholders in my discovery workshop included the following; assistant pastor of large non-denominational megachurch main campus, senior pastor of satellite campus of large non-denominational megachurch, director of leadership network in large non-denominational megachurch, ministry leader of pastor coaching network, senior pastor of older non-denominational church, senior pastor of historic denominational church, laity of historic denominational church, director of small group leadership of large non-denominational megachurch (two of these participants from the large megachurch were formerly pastors of historic churches.)

1x1 Interviews

The participants who I interviewed 1x1 following the workshop were a senior pastor at a large satellite campus of a global non-denominational megachurch, senior pastor of historic denominational church, retired pastor and director of new church development statewide of denominational church.

3-5 Key Biblical Passages

Three biblical passages that I have used as a foundation and guide for my NPO are Acts 1:8, Acts 2:46-47, Mark 9:34-35, Romans 12:3-5, 1 Timothy 6:20-21

Academic Resources

The primary leaders within the specific scope of church culture include:

Thom Rainer (PhD), speaker and author on church growth and change. David Kinnaman, author and president of Barna Group, a research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture. Karl Vaters, pastor, speaker, and author who focuses on the role of the small church for today. Ed Stetzer (PhD), pastor, author, speaker, and professor at Wheaton College who focuses on historic church revitalization. Leonard Sweet (PhD), pastor, author, prolific speaker and professor at George Fox University and Drew University who sees through a semiotic lens looking for signs of the direction of the church. Carey Nieuwhof, author, and speaker who is a leading voice in church leadership and growth today. Henry Cloud (PhD), author and speaker who is the foremost authority on boundaries and healing in a Christian context.

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Appendix 1

Discovery Workshop Description

My Discovery Workshop was held on November 5th, 2020 from 9:30am to 12:30pm. The following participants were in attendance:

- Assistant Pastor, large non-denominational megachurch main campus
- Senior Pastor, satellite campus of large non-denominational megachurch
- Director of Leadership Network, large non-denominational megachurch
- Ministry Leader, pastor coaching network
- Senior Pastor, historic non-denominational church
- Senior Pastor, historic denominational church
- Laity, historic denominational church
- Director of Small Group Leadership, large non-denominational megachurch

All stakeholders participated in person except for one who attended by Zoom. The workshop was held in a large room with comfortable couches and chairs. During the workshop there was a light breakfast, coffee, snacks, and drinks available during two scheduled breaks. After introducing myself and the purpose of the workshop, I shared the agenda. The workshop began with an icebreaker of everyone sharing their name, their ministry, and what activity they would do if they had more time. Ground rules were then shared and expectations explained. It was understood that we were not here to solve a problem, but to evaluate if the NPO was valid and explore the root of that NPO. The stakeholders then proceeded with three exercises that involved looking at questions and using sticky notes to put their answers on easel paper adhered to the wall. The first exercise was a deep dive into the NPO statement with a "Post-Up Activity" followed by a reframing of the NPO. The following exercise was an "Empath Map" looking at the potential outcome of a solved NPO followed by the question, "Why isn't that the case now?" The final exercise was a "Why? 1-5" challenge. This allowed the stakeholders to look at their common and contrasting root causes of the NPO. The stakeholders ended with the development of a final NPO statement.

Discovery Statement

The Discovery Workshop was organized for the purpose of doing qualitative research on a proposed NPO (Need, Problem, Opportunity). Gathered were 8 pastors and church laity who worked cooperatively to determine if there was indeed a cultural gap between newer churches and older historical churches. The following was the agreed summary statement of the original NPO as presented:

Considering both new churches and older historical churches (audience), we've discovered due to assumptions there is a lack of trust (NPO), which is caused by mutual brokenness (root cause). If solved, it would mean they would feel valued, respected, and encouraged to collaborate together to reach people for Jesus (outcome).

Critical Insights from Discovery Workshop

It became apparent in the very beginning of the workshop that the original NPO was worded in such a way that created false assumptions. The stakeholders determined early that church size was not a significant factor in the two identified church categories in the NPO. If there was indeed a cultural gap between newly established churches and older historical churches it was not necessarily due to size. This allowed the group to better focus on the potential root cause with more clarity. One surprising insight was the level of openness that was quickly established in the group. It was not long before we began to see root causes emerging that were more emotional than expected. Furthermore, it was not just on the side of the older historic church feeling somehow fearful, frustrated, suspicious of the motivations of newer churches. Issues such as hurt, and loss were also expressed by the newer megachurch participants. This was indeed unexpected.

1x1 Interview Discoveries

Following the Discovery Workshop, I conducted three 1x1 Interviews by both Zoom and phone. The interviewees were truly diverse. Essentially, all the interviewees agreed with the NPO Summary which they received in advance along with the workshop summary. Interviewee A was a 5th generation pastor from small historical churches who now serves as a senior pastor in a new global megachurch. This provided an incredibly unique perspective for this research. For Interviewee A, what stands out most is the growing gap between leadership events becoming increasingly skewed for new churches leaving historical churches behind. Interviewee B serves as a senior pastor at an older historic church. For this pastor, what stands out most is the resistance of the congregation to understand change is necessary thus creating a gap in communication to learn from newer contrasting church cultures. Finally, Interviewee C who is retired from 12 years of working with new church development in a large denomination had this to say, "One historical church in a large downtown area once said to me, 'why would we want new people here?' Sometimes there is nothing you can do to help them."

Synthesis

In comparing the results from the Discovery Workshop and the 1x1 Interviews there were no stark contrasting findings. The 1x1 Interviews were most helpful in confirming and adding to the work of the stakeholders in the workshop. While the stakeholders were in a position to become more transparent and open in a way that revealed deep emotional struggles with the challenges of working together, the interviews allowed for the discovery of just how deep and wide the problem is for historical churches. The core issue of the communication gap is not theological but seems to be culturally dependent on how the church was birthed. Have generations of families attended a historical church coming to depend on being served verses a newer church birthed in a way that requires everyone to serve for the church to exist. For historical churches trying to learn from newer churches this can cause a gap in communication due to a blindness to the assumptions of the role of the congregation. Thus, leading to frustration, trust issues, fear, suspicion, resistance to letting go of pride. For the newer churches who have a sincere desire to help, there also exists frustration due to the gap in language between the two. Surprisingly, for the new fast-growing church there is

also a great deal of hurt as many older churches often lash out and criticize their growth. One of the blessings of this workshop was to see firsthand how deep the hurt was for the church who seemingly “had it all.” In conclusion, this is clearly not a one-sided issue and hurts Kingdom work not realized.

Next Steps

Upon researching the Bibliography for research into this NPO, it was discovered that this is not an entirely unidentified struggle in working together as growing megachurches try to assist historic churches. Research will begin with understanding where we are today with the understanding of church culture both new and historic, urban and rural. This will help in developing a baseline of assumptions leading to a shared language between cultures. In addition, for pastors of historic churches, I believe that there is a great deal of pain and abuse that has occurred due to loss and frustration. I intend on looking into this possibility through counselors that work with pastors and determine if there may even be instances of PTSD that if understood may allow an approach to support pastors through the lens of healing rather than simply the next new fix-all program. Therefore, I intend on expanding my research upon a better understanding of direction that would include a solution that is as much psychological as it is systems.

Discovery Workshop Documentation

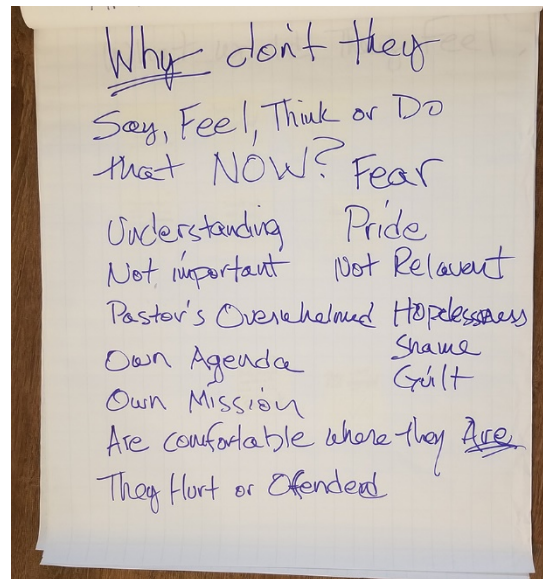
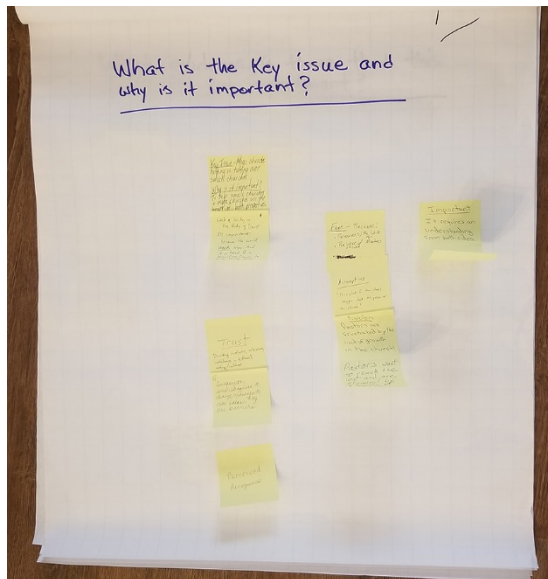
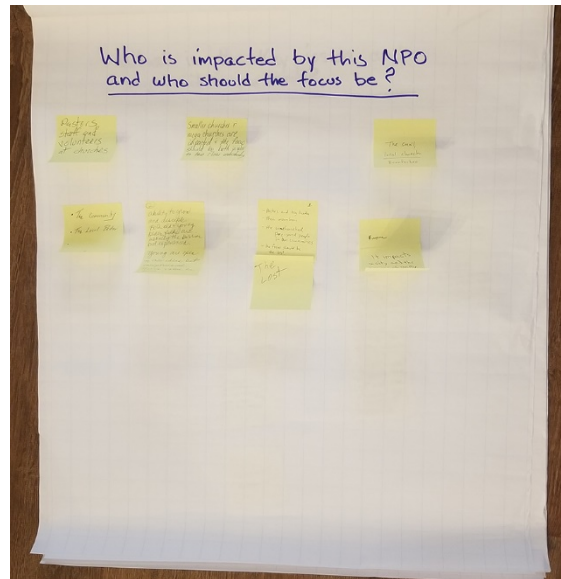
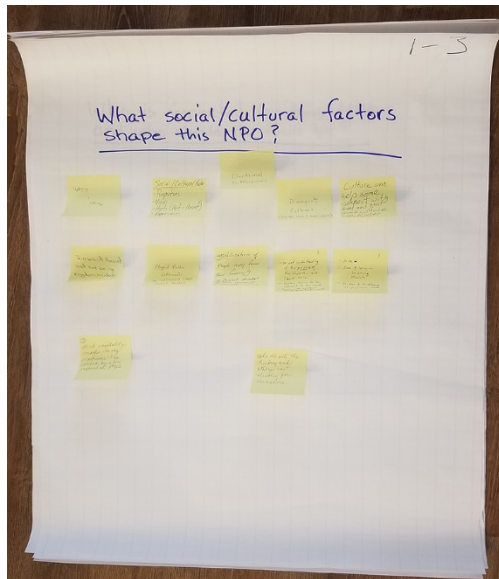
The workshop lasted 3½ hours consisted of three exercises:

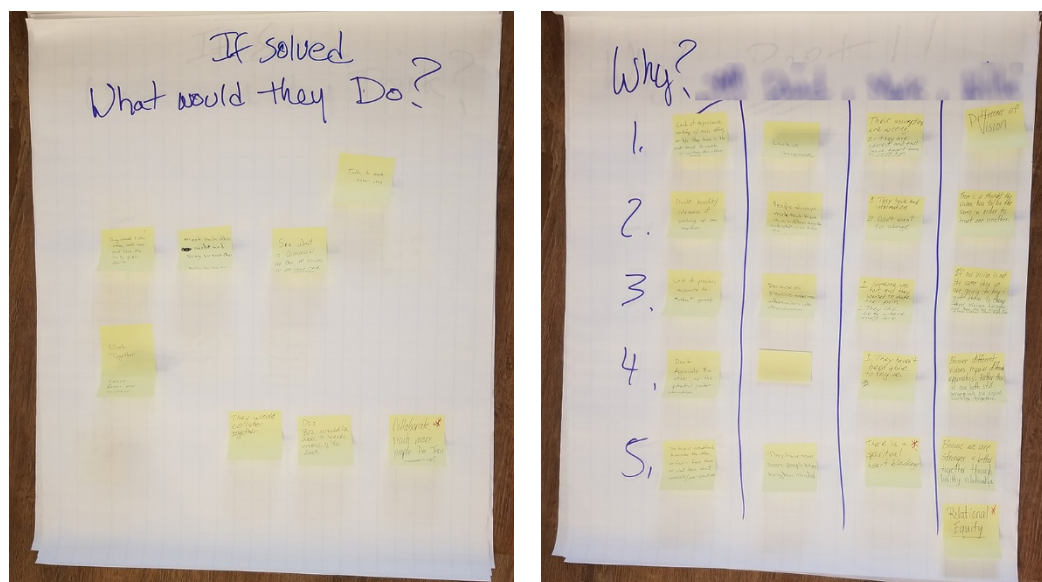
EXERCISE ONE - DISCOVERY: In this exercise the group looked at key issues surrounding the NPO. Responses included, but not limited to, issues such as: Fear, Frustration, Trust Issues, Suspicion; impacting Pastors, the Community, the Lost, the City and Beyond; with factors such as Past and Present Hurts, Pride, Doctrinal Differences, Tension of Traditions; with Critical Opportunities Impacting all churches for Kingdom Growth.

EXERCISE TWO - EMPATHY: In this exercise the stakeholders were asked, if solved what would these two church groups working together do, say, think, and feel? Responses included, but were not limited to, thinking I add Value, We’re in this Together, ready to Lay Down Assumptions; allowing them to Listen more, Co-labor, Reach more People for Jesus; thus feeling like Allies, Unified, Respected, and Encouraged; left saying things like Amazing what we can Learn Together, we should Always Challenge Ourselves. This exercise concluded with asking the important question, why don’t these two groups working together do, say, think, and feel that now? Responses included, but not limited to, pastors overwhelmed, complacency, hurts, offensiveness, guilt, shame, pride, hopelessness, and fear.

EXERCISE THREE - THE 5 WHYS: In this exercise the stakeholders reframed a statement that developed out of exercise one: “Because of assumptions there exists a lack of trust between new and old historical churches.” Reflecting on that statement the following are responses to the question, why is this happening? Responses included, but not limited to, Fear of Change, Previous Bad Experiences, Lack of Kingdom Minded Vision, Bad Information, Unforgiveness, Hurtful

Conversations, Relational Pain, Personal Goals over Kingdom Goals, Assumptions that Vision had to be the Same to Trust, and Spiritual Heart Blockage.





Sample Easel Sheets - Discovery Workshop

One-Page Post-Workshop Message to Stakeholders

Thank you for your valuable participation in my workshop. I am grateful for the time that everyone took out of their day and the travel necessary for you to be there. One thing that stood out to me was the candor and transparency that was shared by everyone in an extremely supportive way. Perhaps that was a key takeaway. Pastors are willing and ready to sit together from a broad ecumenical pool to discuss Kingdom issues in a respectful way. Imagine the possibilities!

As you recall, we began with an NPO (Need, Problem, or Opportunity) identified by me based on my experience and heart for making a way to lift one another up for the Glory of God. The statement was as you recall:

"There exists large vital churches less than 20 years old with a heart for equipping small churches over 40 years old for transformational ministry whose efforts are inhibited by the cultural age gap separated by both praxis and mission expectations."

From there we moved on to creating a Final Summary Statement:

"Considering both new churches and older historical churches, we've discovered due to assumptions there is a lack of trust, which is caused by *mutual* brokenness. If solved would mean they would feel valued, respected, and encouraged to collaborate together to reach people for Jesus."

I added the word *mutual* before brokenness as I felt that more clearly reflected the intention and heart of our work together. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about that

change or any other thoughts from our time together. Also, please accept this gift as a sincere thank you. If you have it already, pass it on to the Timothy in your life! I look forward to staying in touch with you during my journey over the next 3 years working on this project. I pray this work could lead to healing and revitalization for churches both new and historical.

1x1 Interview Documentation

INTERVIEWEE A - pastor (non-denominational), mega-church established less than 25yrs, Director of National Leadership Network associated with global church organization

- 5th Generation Pastor (unique perspective of both new/old, large/small)
- Identified the need to be available to walk alongside or resource another
- We are all interim pastors
- Many large churches are not willing to stay engaged with small churches long term
- Training events skew towards large churches or small churches
- Partnerships between large and small are happening less
- We need to intentionally seek a glimpse of the future
- Benefits to Old/Small - Transformational (mature growing)
- Benefits to Very Large - Transactional (seeker)
- Concurs with the identified NPO

INTERVIEWEE B - pastor (denominational), small church established more than 40yrs

- Older churches do seem to have a barrier to change
- There is mistrust - Latent Resentment
- They are asking "Why would people go to this new church when we are here?"
- Experienced an appointment where there were no new professions of faith in 10yrs
- Need to help people with their Christian Identity and how reaching new people is more important than whether we do the Gloria Patri
- How do I introduce Small Groups to an 85yr old who never new anything else
- Resonates with the struggle identified in NPO

INTERVIEWEE C - retired director (denominational), 12yrs new church development statewide

- There are 2 kinds of church – Those who want to reach out and those who are trying to find their way back to yesterday
- Some leave church because it is not very inviting
- Some churches are motivated to reach out and share what Jesus has done for them
- Leadership needs to be aware of why things are changing inside and out
- Pastors that are very intentional at reaching out are growing
- One church I worked with started in a cafeteria and has continued to grow with its own new facility
- It can be difficult to change directions
- If change is going to happen it must start with the leaders
- A part of change requires new vision in leadership
 - Do they know how to reach people
 - If they keep doing the same things, they will never see a different direction
 - Are they just a social club
- I once had a historical church tell me they just wanted things to stay the same. “Why do we want new people here?”
- Leaders working in partnership with successful churches would be good

Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

Introduction

Historically the Christian church has experienced deep tension and schism which has inhibited transformational growth through relational witness of the Gospel. The tension is made evident throughout the early church recorded in the New Testament of the Christian Bible and through reformation and schism throughout history. Accordingly, in the unprecedented time post Covid-19 epidemic of 2020-21, there exists a clarion call for churches to work together across borders of theology, methodology, and sociology to exchange ideas and strengths for the purpose of realizing a continued growing witness of Christian kingdom living in our world. One of the greatest opportunities is the collaboration between churches that are 40 plus years old, which I will refer to as the historical church, and new church plants less than 25 years old. Efforts of collaboration and reciprocal learning are often inhibited by the cultural age gap separated by both praxis and mission expectations. This paper will explore biblical, historical, and contemporary literature in search of a narrative that is understood across church age groups for the purpose of spreading the Gospel in a way that invites growing numbers to seek a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Section 1: Biblical And Theological Foundations

Kingdom Living in the Biblical World

The birth of the church as recorded in the book of Acts, Chapter 2, illuminates that the community of Christ followers grew quickly and in large numbers. As time progressed, there is less reference to church growth as attention turns towards increasing conflict within the church body and begins to dominate the narrative. This section will examine several scriptural passages that bear witness to the development of the early church. The biblical passage referenced in Section 1 shows a progression of movement in scripture that illuminates the narrative of God's story as scenes moving in a relational ebb and flow of vision, conflict, and restoration. The organization as such is as follows: the *Expectation* of Christ for the church, the Incarnation of kingdom living, the *Polarization* of wills, and the *Harmonization* of Christ followers.

The biblical narrative provides a perspective and framework that sets the stage for an ecumenical collaboration towards mutual learning and support. According to Barna Research in their *State of the Church 2020*³⁰ study, regular church attenders have declined 44% from 2000 to 2019. Furthermore, according to Outreach Magazines annual *Top 100*³¹ study in cooperation with Lifeway Research they found that only 4 of the top 20 fastest growing churches in 2019 are older than 25 years. Additionally, 14 of those churches identify themselves as non-denominational. Of the

³⁰ "Signs of Decline & Hope Among Key Metrics of Faith." n.d. Barna Group. Accessed April 14, 2021. <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

³¹ "Outreach 100: 2019 Fastest-Growing Churches in America." n.d. Accessed April 14, 2021. <https://outreach100.com/fastest-growing-churches-in-america/2019>.

remaining 6, all have undergone major contemporary worship space renovations. This scriptural observation gives insight on what may be barriers to vision and expectation between these two groups. As we enter a post-Covid world that exists in a shrinking global community, we will for some time remain in a pandemic culture. According to ReachRight, an organization focused on helping churches grow, a study³² by The Church Executive states that church decline is greater for smaller churches, while churches over 350 show the least negative impact to recent decline and the most growth. These statistics support that churches planted since 1996 are the most vital in growth and without significant changes historical churches will continue to see decline. Therefore, if indeed the Gospel is the center of a life-giving church, it is imperative to work together across the age gaps of the church to stop this trend. By doing so invites the expansion of the kingdom of God in a way that reflects the birth of the church where both large and small gatherings take place.

Scriptural Discussions

EXPECTATION: ACTS 1:8

The biblical narrative of the birth of the Christian movement called “The Way” began with the final command of Jesus Christ as recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. Acts 1:8 reads, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (NRSV) The instruction includes both the direction of where the movement will take place and how it will be achieved. Exegetical scholar Mikeal Parsons points out, “Ironically the departure of Jesus inaugurates the beginning of the church—the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the beginning of the worldwide mission.”³³ The church has not endured for two thousand years because of excellent discipleship programs or evangelism strategies. It has thrived due to the power of the Holy Spirit with the teaching of Jesus leading the way. What the western church needs today is to embrace the power of God received through the Holy Spirit.³⁴ The timing of the ascension of Christ is a witness that it was not his call to be part of the church, but instead empower the church to lead itself with the expectation that the apostles are fully equipped to fulfill their role within the mission of God. C.K. Barrett states³⁵ that it is the promise of the power of the Holy Spirit, not their own to continue, to perform miracles and act with the authority given. It is the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that becomes the divine agency of that power.

³² “25 Church Statistics You Need To Know For 2021.” 2021. REACHRIGHT. January 27, 2021. <https://reachrightstudios.com/25-church-statistics-for-2021/>.

³³ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia Commentaries on The New Testament. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 28.

³⁴ Acts 1:8 (New Revised Standard Version).

³⁵ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, International Critical Commentary. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 79.

INCARNATION: ACTS 2:46-47

After Pentecost, the early church grew exponentially. Luke in the book of Acts describes the early church community in relationship with one another both corporately and in small groups. In Acts 2:46-47 Luke records the following, "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (NIV) The New King James interprets the phrase "at home" as "from house to house." The sense here is that gatherings took place in multiple places not just one or the other.

This is the period where the church grew exponentially. What is important to observe is that the movement grew by meeting in both large and small gatherings. Ben Witherington states, "Vv. 46-47 indicate that Christians were meeting daily together, sharing food 'from house to house,' which might suggest they rotated where they ate, or more likely that since there were a goodly number they did this sharing in various homes."³⁶ As thousands were being saved, the large gatherings were witness to the believers that the Holy Spirit was indeed changing lives and a witness to the outside community that something remarkable was taking place. The church had become an incarnate example of kingdom living. This combined practice of both large and small gatherings continued to support church growth. Ajith Fernando further sites this, "House fellowships were common in the early church; later they developed into 'house churches.' In Corinth, there seem to have been times when the whole church met 'probably ... in the large house of one of the wealthy Christians in the city.'"³⁷

POLARIZATION: MARK 9:34-35

While the church grows, conflict begins to emerge. In 1 Corinthians 3:34-35, Paul reveals that jealousy within the church has occurred. However, rather than focus on what happens within church families, what is more relevant is the core struggle that exists within the Christian heart. This struggle both within a church family or across a region is the same. It is a polarization between the world view and the upside-down reframing that Christ has come to deliver. This conflict begins to reveal itself on the path of discipleship with the original twelve who are chosen by Jesus to illustrate and bring witness to what will be the struggles of the church. Mark 9:34-35 states, "But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.'" (NRSV) James Edwards notes this struggle, "The model of service and humiliation that Jesus teaches the disciples can be heard only on the road of humiliation to Jerusalem—if it can be heard at all. At no point does the way of Jesus diverge more sharply from the way of the world than on the question

³⁶ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 163.

³⁷ Ajith Fernando, *Acts, The NIV Application Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 123.

of greatness.”³⁸ This struggle of will continues into the church as it discovers its identity in Christ. Edwards further states, “The challenge is to be great in things that matter to God. Nothing is greater in God’s eyes than giving, and no vocation affords the opportunity to give more than that of a servant.”³⁹ This struggle would be shared within the Church for the next two millennia. Who is greater and who is the least of these?

HARMONIZATION: ROMANS 12:3-5

In Romans 12, Paul picks up the mantle from Jesus as he leads the church giving witness to the same struggles with disciples and churches. The central struggle as first seen among the disciples, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”⁴⁰ As the churches begin to look quite different from one another, the Romans understood themselves as more prominent. Ben Witherington suggests, “Paul here is concerned to help his converts have a proper sense of self, which leads neither to overinflated or underdeveloped senses of self-worth and self-esteem,”⁴¹.

Further in Romans 12:4-5, Paul speaks of a dynamic church model in response to church wide issues across the region. Paul appeals to dialectic discourse in verse 5 which states, “we, who are many, are one body in Christ.” Michael Bird argues, “Paul probably borrows from a well-known Greco-Roman metaphor about the “body politic” to stress that all believers are “members” of the “one body,” and while the members are diverse in their function, they remain inalienably dependent on each other.”⁴² Both within the body of one church or across the community of churches, there is only one body and one head of that body. Thus, harmonization comes at the understanding that no one is without worth to the whole body. Each member participates with their own unique part to play in the final chorus.

Synthesis of Themes, Values, and Commitments

The early Church was birthed out of the release of the Holy Spirit empowered by God. Through the proclamation and expectation of Jesus Christ that power would fall upon all believers through their baptism ten days after Christ’s ascension. There is no evidence of hesitation on the part of the newly

³⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 287.

³⁹ Ibid., 287.

⁴⁰ Romans 12:3 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁴¹ Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 298.

⁴² Michael F. Bird, *Romans*, ed. Scot McKnight, The Story of God Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 425.

converted followers of Jesus Christ to believe that the favor of God the creator was upon them.⁴³ They boldly lived in ways that reflected the love that Jesus witnessed to those around him. As a result, the Church grew exponentially with seemingly no limit as revival drew more followers to encounters with the Holy Spirit as lives were changed. Significantly, there is no division between large gatherings of what would have been hundreds if not thousands worshiping together, while concurrently meeting together in smaller groups from home to home. This is the model for unencumbered incarnational kingdom living.

Soon conflict and tension would ensue as the human desire to manage or maintain grows.⁴⁴ Jesus had taught the disciples that he has come to redefine and re-sign what leadership is all about.⁴⁵ Leadership is no longer controlling others from above, it is submitting control to the Holy Spirit and leading from below. This tension would eventually dismantle the fluidity of community kingdom living following Pentecost. Christians would begin to reflect worldly priorities and abandon humility and altruism for others.⁴⁶ The apostle Paul of the New Testament would now carry the mantle of harmonization to proclaim that we are all equal children of God.⁴⁷

This biblical narrative paints a picture that the Church was born without limits under the power of the Holy Spirit. There were no assumptions because there was no precedence. New believers participated in both large and small gatherings. They did not choose one or the other, but instead made worship part of their new kingdom lifestyle. What is the contemporary basis to believe that the same Holy Spirit cannot lead the Church today? It is vital that big churches and small churches, old churches and new churches, work in harmony to witness God moving today without regard to who is greater, but instead who is the least.

Section 2: Topic History and Key Voices

Church Growth Past and Present

As demonstrated in Section 1, it is evident that church growth was not initially a problem at the beginning of the Christian church. The church grew rapidly and spread across the region throughout the near east despite the conflict that arose between the new Christians. This section will examine first the early practices of the church in the first several centuries of its birth. Following, will be the response to the decline of the Christian church in the last century. Finally, this section

⁴³ Acts 2:47 (New International Version)

⁴⁴ Galatians 2:11-14 (NRSV)

⁴⁵ John 13:7-8

⁴⁶ 2 Timothy 4:1-4

⁴⁷ Romans 12:3

will examine two key voices of the church today recognizing that as of the writing of this essay the future of church praxis is unclear and opportunities for both historical and new churches to collaborate becomes essential.

EARLY CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

The early church was not something new, but instead a rebirth of a faith estimated to be in existence for two millennia. Dr. Justo Gonzalez in his book, *Story of Christianity: Volume 1*, states, "The earliest Christians did not reject Judaism, but were convinced that their faith was the fulfillment of the age-long expectation of a Messiah."⁴⁸ Christians were initially followers of a Messiah promised by the god whom they worshiped called Yahweh. Their book of faith prophesied the coming of a deliverer. Micha 5:2 prophesied, "But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." (NRSV) Collaboration existed through the tradition of their faith history. Early Jews did not reject their faith, they simply added Christianity upon it as an extension of its fulfillment. What is of particular interest is the mindset in which they worshiped. For a Jew, whose ancestors have waited centuries for the messiah to arrive, this is indeed good news. Gonzalez states, "Those early communion services did not center on the Lord's passion, but rather on his victory by which a new age had dawned. It was much later—centuries later—that the focus of Christian worship shifted towards the death of Jesus."⁴⁹ This is worth noting for further review as the church evolves throughout history. Gonzalez continues to point out that early church gatherings were not just an event, but instead they were reflections of their new life led by their Messiah in community with other followers. Here Gonzalez points out the tone of the early church, "The most remarkable characteristic of those early communion services was that they were celebrations. The tone was one of joy and gratitude, rather than sorrow and repentance. In the beginning, communion was part of an entire meal."⁵⁰

In his book, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, Alan Kreider looks to the notable 2nd and 3rd century theologian Origen for insight on the early church. Kreider writes of Origen, "The patient God was at work, Origen affirmed, and God used not influential or powerful people but obscure fishers and hunters to achieve a huge end."⁵¹ Kreider argues that the early church was not an expansion of fever induced followers running a race to evangelize others. Instead, the early church was a "mysterious, bubbling life forces" which he refers to as a ferment. He states, "The churches

⁴⁸ Gonzalez, Justo L.. *Story of Christianity: Volume 1: The Early Church to the Reformation* (Kindle Locations 810-811). Harper Collins, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Part I.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Kreider, Alan. *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* (p. 12). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

grew in many places, taking varied forms. They proliferated because the faith that these fishers and hunters embodied was attractive to people who were dissatisfied with their old cultural and religious habits, who felt pushed to explore new possibilities, and who then encountered Christians who embodied a new manner of life that pulled them toward what the Christians called “rebirth” into a new life.”⁵² Kreider goes on to suggest that they did this in a patient manner much to the surprise of a contemporary writer. He goes on to support this by looking at early church theologian Tertullian, “the key to the believers’ patient lifestyle is their confession that in the resurrection of Jesus, God has vindicated his teachings and way, and as a result they expect that they too will be resurrected.”⁵³ Kreider notes that other factors were at play drawing many to these gatherings, “Rumors that God was present in Christian gatherings may also have attracted outsiders to investigate Christianity. They told others what the Christians were experiencing, and the churches grew.”⁵⁴ Even during persecution the early church gathered with the anticipation of worshiping God who was in their midst.

Further study supports the deep social aspect of the gatherings of the church in the first century. The emphasis was an intimacy of community gathered at the table much like the biblical witness of Jesus at the table during times of revelation that his presence was made known thus emphasizing to the readers the significance of the shared meal. Luke 24:30-31 records, “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.”(NSRV) In the same way, Valeriy A. Alikin, in her work, “The Origin Of The Weekly Gathering In The Early Church,” states, “Thus, the domestic setting, the size of the house-church group, and the centrality of a shared meal in the community’s life could all contribute to a certain intimacy and strong solidarity among the members.”⁵⁵ Alikin goes on to conclude that the Eucharist was not just a standalone event, but instead an integral part of the socialization of a church, meeting the need to be fed, and meeting the need to be known. Alikin states, “In the first centuries of the Christian Church, besides the eucharistic meal, the reading out of texts, preaching, singing and prayer, there were a number of other actions Christians could perform in their communal gatherings: the holy kiss, the laying on of hands, foot washing, anointing, collections of money and offerings of food, liturgical acclamations,

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁵ Valeriy A. Alikin, “THE ORIGIN OF THE WEEKLY GATHERING IN THE EARLY CHURCH,” in *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering, Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Brill, 2010), 57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w76wv6.6>.

exorcisms and healings.”⁵⁶ Worship was not limited to song and word, but was an immersive experience to belong with Jesus Christ at the head of the table.

CHURCH DEVELOPMENTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

By the 20th Century, the Christian Church had migrated primarily to Europe and the Americas. According to Pew Research, in 1910 about two-thirds of the world’s Christians lived in Europe, where they had spread throughout for the past millennium. In a study reported in December 2011, that percentage dropped to about a quarter of Christians living in Europe, with a slight increase in the Americas.⁵⁷ The major shift is the growth of the Christian population in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Asia-Pacific. Overall, this reports states that between 1910 and 2010 Christianity grew 1.4 billion. However, the story is incomplete as the global population has also grown proportionally leaving the percentage of Christians in the world essentially the same at around 32%. For Christianity in the west this is not encouraging. As other parts of the world experience growth in the past 100 years equal to the total growth of Christianity since the birth of Christ, the church in the west has declined in percentage of population by 30%. These statistics demonstrate that while Christianity’s base across the world is spreading creating opportunity for exponential growth ahead, the church in the west is in sharp decline. This sub-section will illuminate some of the observations in that decline over the past 30 years.

In 1988, James V. Heidinger II wrote a book entitled, *United Methodist Renewal: What Will It Take?* Heidinger observes that between 1964 and 1985 the United Methodist Church membership declined 1.9 million members or 17% of its membership. Additionally, he states that church school on Sunday dropped 50%.⁵⁸ Heidinger states several potential reasons for this decline. One of particular interest is his data from a Gallup Poll reporting that 60% of United Methodists interviewed don’t open the Bible even once a month.⁵⁹ Heidinger proposes that fact as reason for the declining focus on theology, doctrine, and misplaced loyalties. An observation here suggests a misplaced response. Early church revival took place without doctrine. It happened sitting around a table. Furthermore, the fact that the issue has been critiqued for 33 years with little impact to slow the decline certainly is a clarion call to step outside one’s tribe for help.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 288.

⁵⁷ “The Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), December 19, 2011, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

⁵⁸ James V. Heidinger, *United Methodist Renewal: What Will It Take?*, 1st ed (Wilmore, KY: Bristol Books, 1988). 13.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 15.

George Barna founder of Barna Research in his book, *Revolution* published in 2005, joins the growing voice that the church is undergoing a paradigm shift. Barna contends that the solution to the declining church is not better systems, but instead a need for churches to move from doctrine centered to Christocentric minded. Barna notes some startling research at the time of this publication. He states that "8 out of 10 believers do not feel they have entered into the presence of God, or experienced a connection with God, during the worship service."⁶⁰ Furthermore, he shares research that shows fewer than 1 out of 10 believers, when asked how they want to be known, mention descriptions that reflect their relationship with God.⁶¹ In his book, Barna believes that the church has spent too much time focusing on activity based relationships and argues that the focus needs to migrate to relationships centered around the cause of Christ. Barna goes on to suggest, "We should keep in mind that what we call "church" is just one interpretation of how to develop and live a faith-centered life. We made it up. It may be healthy or helpful, but it is not sacrosanct."⁶² He proposes the revolution is about recognizing that we are not called to go to church. We are called to be the church.⁶³

Contemporary Voices in Cooperation for Kingdom Growth

This subsection will look at several qualified voices with different approaches to the key challenges of church leaders working together to grow the church universal. These voices were chosen not for their agreement to the issues at hand, but because of their diversity on the issues, thus allowing for new ideas to be birthed.

ECUMENICAL UNITY

John H. Armstrong is a pastor, author of numerous books, and adjunct professor of evangelism at Wheaton College. In his book, *Your Church Is Too Small* published in 2010, Armstrong contends that unity is the solution to bringing vitality back into the church. He states that his thesis is simple: "The road to the future must run through the past"⁶⁴ This statement is an important one since it reminds the reader that what we know is conditioned by the past. Armstrong's thesis statement is a strong persuasive argument towards what happened as those described in Acts 2 of the Bible were primarily Christianized Jews bringing their past with them to what lied ahead. While Armstrong's thesis suggests running through something toward something new, his thesis is inconsistent throughout his work. Armstrong soon follows up his thesis statement with, "Building

⁶⁰ George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005). 31.

⁶¹ Ibid., 33.

⁶² Ibid., 38.

⁶³ Ibid., 39.

⁶⁴ John H. Armstrong, *Your Church Is Too Small: Why Unity in Christ's Mission Is Vital to the Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2010). 17.

one's faith and life on various passages in the Bible understood through private experience results in nothing less than a confusing cacophony of Christian noise."⁶⁵ Armstrong goes on to discuss the necessity of unity based on core orthodoxy to insure vitality in the church thus suggesting you don't run through something you stay where you are ignoring the experience of the living Holy Spirit bringing revelation to each new era.

Armstrong states, "Today, millions of Christian congregations hold the same core doctrines while continuing to express distinctively different patterns of thought, government, and worship, not to mention different understandings about what each one believes to be truly essential."⁶⁶ Here Armstrong appears to be making an effective statement supporting his thesis. However, he follows immediately with these words, "This sad story of disunity..."⁶⁷ These few words undermine the many strong views of ecumenical cooperation found in his book. Ironically, unity is not mentioned in his thesis statement, but is a common thread throughout his work. Armstrong's insistence on unity around orthodox belief as the only way forward with a positive outcome contradicts the reality of the early 1st century church, which grew 3,000 in a day as recorded in Acts 2:41. The birth of the church at that time grew without an understanding of orthodox doctrine. Armstrong defines orthodox as a term that "came into the church at the Council of Chalcedon to express the correct way of understanding divine revelation in Jesus Christ."⁶⁸ How does Armstrong support his claim that unity around a shared agreed upon understanding of doctrine established in the 5th century as essential when the fastest growth in the church had taken place several hundred years earlier?

While Armstrong appears to display contradictory thoughts about coexistence in the church as a body of Christians in a region, he does make some powerful statements arguing his thesis. Armstrong argues, "Our task is not to form parishes but to be the people of God in a mixed society where we live among those who are not yet in the church."⁶⁹ Particularly strong is his statement, "We are to be the church for them, not for us."⁷⁰ This statement is a powerful witness to the events at the birth of the church as recorded in Acts 2:42-47. Another strong suggestion by Armstrong is that the real power behind cooperation between churches comes from being missional-ecumenical empowered by the Holy Spirit.⁷¹ He suggests moving from being attractional evangelism and incarnational evangelism. Armstrong illustrates his thoughts by comparison. Instead of invite to

⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 89.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 204.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 111.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 177

church, invite to belong. Instead of repeating a prayer, experience the good news. Instead of focusing on confessions, focus on transformation.⁷² Excluding the contradictions and exclusivity of several of his statements, Armstrong's work is extremely helpful in pushing church leaders to imagine what cooperation with other Christian tribes would look like from a practical perspective. His work also aligns with the vision other key voices in church vitality have observed. Finally, with respect to the barriers of working together in mission with other Christian tribes Armstrong contends, "I've noticed that most divisions in the church are not because of a major doctrinal disagreement; they are the result of a breakdown in our love for one another. When love grows cold, it isn't too hard to find a "cause" that allows us to justify breaking fellowship with someone."⁷³

ORGANIC CHURCH

According to his bio on frankviola.org, Frank Viola is an author, speaker, and blogger for nearly two decades.⁷⁴ Viola has challenged the precedent for church tradition praxis and pushed readers toward what he considers authentic Christian community. One of his most talked about and bestselling books is *Pagan Christianity*, co-authored with George Barna. First published in 2002, Viola in his preface describes the opposition between Jesus, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees a revealing clue to the challenges in our churches today. Viola asserts, "As the official interpreters of God's Word, the Pharisees were endowed with the power of creating tradition."⁷⁵ He goes on to say, "The error of the Sadducees moved in the opposite direction. They subtracted whole segments of Scripture—deeming only the law of Moses worthy to be observed."⁷⁶ He then contends that contemporary Christianity has repeated their errors by adding tradition to control and constrict the movement of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, he suggests the opposite is also true that contemporary church today has eliminated a great bulk of the New Testament.⁷⁷ Viola then proceeds to set up the premise of the book with this statement, "An organic church is simply a church that is born out of spiritual life instead of constructed by human institutions and held together by religious programs. Organic churches are characterized by Spirit-led, open-participatory meetings and nonhierarchical

⁷² Ibid., 177.

⁷³ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁴ "Beyond Evangelical | The Blog of Frank Viola - Official Blog of Author & Speaker Frank Viola. Digging below the Surface and Moving beyond the Shallows in Today's Christianity.," accessed April 29, 2021, <https://frankviola.org/>.

⁷⁵ Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices*, Revised, Updated ed. edition (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2008). Kindle postion 207.

⁷⁶ Ibid., Preface.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

leadership. This is in stark contrast to a clergy-led, institution-driven church.”⁷⁸ While the importance of the Holy Spirit may be vital, it is simply false to say that there is no Biblical precedent for hierarchical leadership. In fact, Paul specifically gives his protegee Timothy instructions for establishing layered leadership in the church. Paul gives specific detail on how leadership should be established and the criteria for discerning leadership. This leadership structure is laid out in 1 Timothy 3 where Paul gives instructions for both Bishops or overseers and Deacons. Essentially, to suggest that hierarchical leadership is unbiblical would appear unwarranted.

Viola and Barna go on to evaluate different areas of contemporary church and contend that they are not Biblical traditions and, in most cases, have pagan roots. An example of this is their argument concerning order of worship in a church service. They begin their concern with this statement, “You can scour your Bible from beginning to end, and you will never find anything that remotely resembles our order of worship.”⁷⁹ They further make their point by suggesting “the Catholic Mass was based partly on the Judaic Temple service, partly on Greek mystery rituals of purification, vicarious sacrifice, and participation.”⁸⁰ Following this logic would suggest that if an evil person ritually ate sandwiches every Sunday for lunch then that would imply anyone who ate sandwiches every Sunday for lunch was evil. Just because a pagan had a particular practice for social gathering does not make that practice unchristian. Jesus is not absent, just unknown.

What Viola and Barna do well is challenge the norm. Asking the question, does routine become static and if static can that be life giving? If Jesus Christ is indeed a risen, living, mentor, does he not still sit among those who know him and are known by him? An organic church would be life giving if allowed to be freed from routine and set on a path to follow one who is on the move. For authors Viola and Barna, organic church is realized by the fruit of the spirit made evident through a relationship with Jesus Christ. They state, “True discipleship is about bearing fruit for the Kingdom of God based on the development and activation of Christlike character. True discipleship is knowing Jesus Christ and allowing Him to live His life in us.”⁸¹ Clearly important is the emphasis on a relational community reflective of the early church during its first three centuries. This statement sums up well the influence of the authors pushing against the status quo of the church today, “It’s in that community that we learn Christ to be parents, children, husbands, and wives. It’s in that community where every member learns Him together, hears Him together, and follows Him together.”⁸²

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁸¹ Ibid., 255.

⁸² Ibid., 256.

Frank Viola follows up *Pagan Christianity* with his book, *Finding Organic Church*. In it he lays out the groundwork in extensive detail for discovering or planting an organic church. He opens the book with a powerful motive for doing such by stating, "the most primitive expression of the ekklesia (church) is found in the fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit before time. We can say, then, that the church finds its origins in the Godhead in the timeless past."⁸³ The implication here is that the community of the church existed before creation itself. As the ekklesia, Christians are gathered for the purpose of reflecting who God already is in a place where God has first arrived.

Specific to the objective of this essay, one important point Viola makes concerning diseases of an organic church is where growth is retarded because of certain factors. He argues that a symptom of an unhealthy organic church happens when only a few people function in roles when the church gathers.⁸⁴ Viola suggests that life giving requires serving others not just receiving from others.

LASTING IMPACT

One of the champions of leadership and church development today is author and speaker Carey Nieuwhof. His bio on Amazon states, "Nieuwhof's blog is accessed by church and non-church leaders over 1.5 million times a month."⁸⁵ His influence in the church today is evident by the diverse church leaders who frequently appear on his podcast. Founding pastor of Connexus Church in Barrie, Ontario, Nieuwhof now focuses his time observing and equipping leadership in the rapidly changing church of the post Covid-19 pandemic era.

One of Nieuwhof's most influential books is *Lasting Impact* published in 2015. In it Nieuwhof challenges the frequent comment from stagnant churches, "What's wrong with small churches?"⁸⁶ Nieuwhof's appropriate response to that question is the platform for his work in *Lasting Impact*, "People need to be reached. The love of Jesus was designed to spill far beyond the walls of the church, not be contained within them."⁸⁷ What a prophetic word for a time today when there recently existed months when the church was locked out of the building. For Nieuwhof the

⁸³ Frank Viola, *Finding Organic Church: A Comprehensive Guide to Starting and Sustaining Authentic Christian Communities*, 1st ed (Colorado Springs, Colo: David C. Cook, 2009). 73.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁸⁵ "Carey Nieuwhof", Amazon, accessed April 29, 2021, https://smile.amazon.com/Carey-Nieuwhof/e/B003GJCLCM?ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1&qid=1619671414&sr=8-1.

⁸⁶ Nieuwhof, Carey. *Lasting Impact: 7 Powerful Conversations That Will Help Your Church Grow*. The reThink Group, Inc.. Kindle Edition. Chapter 1.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

important missional task is, "In every decision, focus on who you want to reach, not on who you want to keep. Commit to losing yourself for the sake of finding others."⁸⁸

Americans affiliated with a faith organization continues to decline. For the first time in Gallup's 80-year history of researching religion in America, house of worship affiliation has declined to below 50% according to their most recent poll in 2020. At the time of their first poll in 1937, that number was 73% where it essentially remained for six decades. Since the turn of the century that number has declined steadily. In their most recent report, Gallup suggests the reason in this way, "The decline in church membership, then, appears largely tied to population change, with those in older generations who were likely to be church members being replaced in the U.S. adult population with people in younger generations who are less likely to belong."⁸⁹ As a result, church leaders have sought to identify ways to reverse the disturbing trend. At the time of the writing of *Lasting Impact*, Nieuwhof observed the implication ahead as he states, "Church leaders who study the trends happening around us and stay current with shifts in thinking and ideologies will always have an easier time connecting with emerging generations than those who don't."⁹⁰ Nieuwhof goes on to suggest that in the years ahead churches that thrive will "study culture, and in that process, they will become flexible, agile, and adaptive."⁹¹

Essential to the way forward is the priority of relationship as mission, suggests Nieuwhof. Placing a higher importance on relationship over singing and speaking will be vital to connecting with the changing culture. Nieuwhof asserts, "Churches that elevate relationship, both for new attenders and regular attenders, will see far more effectiveness in the future than churches that don't."⁹² Nieuwhof summarizes his thoughts in an insightful way that proves to be quite prophetic for the pandemic time such as this, "Every time there is a change in history, there's potential to gain and potential to lose. I believe the potential to gain is greater than the potential to lose. Why? As despairing or as cynical as some might be (sometimes understandably) over the church's future, we have to remind ourselves that the church was Jesus' idea, not ours."⁹³

Through his blogs and podcasts, Carey Nieuwhof continues to be one of the most contemporary prolific voices in the church when it comes to reaching out to both large and small churches. In a

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Gallup Inc, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," Gallup.com, March 29, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Chapter 6.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., Conclusion.

mid-pandemic post of 2021, Nieuwhof looks at the challenges and responses by churches unwilling to sit back and wait for a future that will never look like the past. Nieuwhof declares, "Crisis is a cradle for innovation. And the future belongs to the innovators."⁹⁴ In another blog post, Nieuwhof suggests that in-person church is here to stay. However, what that looks like might make the short sighted uneasy. Gatherings that are familiar in large spaces may be replaced or supplemented by residential or smaller social gathering places. Nieuwhof suggests having the courage to trust that change may drive the mission of God further faster.⁹⁵ Further making his point Nieuwhof makes this statement illustrating the need to pivot our perspective of what norm is, "Today, most pastors use church online to get people into the building. In the future, most pastors will use the building to reach people online."⁹⁶

Section 3: Synthesis and Conclusion

In 2021, due to a global pandemic, there exists a crossing of the Jordan river moment for the church. Like the entire nation of Israel who crossed a single river and arrived at the same location together⁹⁷, so goes the church around the world. For months, both historic and new churches found themselves with their doors closed attempting to navigate through understanding what church is going to look like in a post pandemic 21st century world. A time when the world was rebooted to begin something new, while holding onto the tradition of the past. The church, exiled from what had become the norm, crossed a border together that accelerated the historic and humbled the new.

Areas of Agreement/Consensus

The church during the first few centuries saw growth as a patient community doing life together with energy and optimism. This contrasts with the urgency of stopping a declining church in the 20th & 21st century. Evidence suggests rumors spread that God was present at these early Christian gatherings as people came to see for themselves. Close relationships and intimacy developed as community emphasis was centered around life shared at the table. Christians were responding to Jesus' words in Matthew 28:20 by teaching others what he had taught the disciples. Jesus had witnessed for the church to follow him doing things like the laying on of hands, foot washing, anointing, exorcisms, and healings, to name a few. Early Christians followed Christ's example by

⁹⁴ "The Big Church Leadership Mistake of 2021 (That You Can Still Avoid)," CareyNieuwhof.com, April 19, 2021, <https://careynieuwhof.com/big-church-leadership-mistake-2021/>.

⁹⁵ "In-Person Church Attendance Is Here To Stay (But 5 Ways It's Changing In the Future)," CareyNieuwhof.com, November 19, 2020, <https://careynieuwhof.com/in-person-church-attendance-is-here-to-stay-but-5-ways-its-changing-in-the-future/>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Joshua 3 (New Revised Standard Version).

doing the same. Contemporaries agree that a return to an incarnate church with the Holy Spirit leading as the driving force is essential to reversing the decline of church engagement with younger generations. Returning to a Christocentric community of believers with the Bible as the foundation of praxis appears to be the clarion call a life-giving church today.

Additionally, what connects leaders today is the strong consensus that the prime mission of the church historic or new is to be outward focused. However, this proves to be more of a challenge for historic churches who have existed for decades on a model of being served. Having a passion for those who have not yet arrived through the doors both physical or virtual over those who are already here is the necessary submission to the mission. Employing a sense of belonging over membership is essential for the church. To be the incarnate church today requires a DNA of serving (belong) rather than being served (member).

Ongoing Tensions, Disagreements, and Pressure Points

While all agree at some level that it is vital for the church to embrace the relational church model centered around the table that Jesus has set, not all agree on what that looks like. What to let go of, and what to hold on to remains to be the question. Some would argue that the problem lies with the pastoral organizational structure of the church getting in the way of the organic Holy Spirit led church with a non-hierarchical structure. Leaders suggest that hierarchical leadership is not Biblical. However, Matthew 18:15-17 instructs otherwise. The community must be willing to submit to the leadership as Christ submitted to the father.⁹⁸ What is at odds here is where the hierarchical structure lies. What appears to be the contention is that there are often offices of authority within the church body when the Biblical structure of hierarchical leadership is external to the smaller community. In the early church, authority was regional not internal.

Other tension points remain such as, is big bad? Mega churches are growing today as many smaller churches are dying and the trend appears to be moving the church farther from one another. Large churches might make it more difficult to have intimate relationships with other believers making it challenging to meet the changing needs of younger generations. While smaller churches might lack the powerful experience of corporate worship as reflected in the early church practice of Acts 2:46-47, "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. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." (NSRV)

Gaps in Vision of Opportunity

Now the question more important than ever, is church growth the objective or the evidence of authentic church community? The early church did not have a plan or a doctrine. The early church simply grew because of a community built with Jesus at the center. There has never been a greater opportunity to be connected and serve the kingdom together as both the historical and new church

⁹⁸ Luke 22:42 (New Revised Standard Version).

cross the Jordan into a post pandemic world. New mega churches could serve alongside small historic churches to make opportunities for intimate gatherings to do life around the table. Small historic churches can partner with large new churches to create opportunities for Holy Spirit filled corporate gatherings that energize the body of Christ and invite others to come and see. This might be a hybrid church model much like what is being experienced through new on-line streaming models as a response to changing social meeting limitations.

Unlike church leadership in the past who leaned on experience to develop models for the future, we now live in a world where instead of looking back for answers to execute, we must look ahead for the questions to ask. This is an unprecedented time where often disagreements enlighten the leader with new questions to be asking. Where unity is not the goal, but instead the harmony of a chorus each with their own part that reverberates throughout the kingdom of God. By disagreeing on issues such as authority in the church, leaders can discern where potential opportunities to be more Christlike may exist. Without a doubt this is an exciting time to be asking these questions as both historic and new churches seek answers together. If there is one thing that can be agreed upon in a season such as this, "Jesus has left the building."

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Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

NPO Statement

The culture that takes root at the birth of a church over 40yrs old and a church plant less than 20yrs old are diametrically opposed to one another, thus limiting collaboration for the shared mission of reaching new people for Jesus Christ.

NPO Scope and Constraints

The scope of this NPO is to include leaders in both small and large church settings, as well as new and established churches. The intended outcome is to develop self-awareness and narrative to facilitate creative dialog that is mutually beneficial for the growth of the church. Solutions include on-line workshops and cohort coaching available both in-person and virtually to church leadership, focusing on relationships and healing rather than church programs and processes. The target end users are pastors and governing church boards. The costs would include web development for the delivery of material and resources.

NPO Context

The NPO context includes churches both denominational and non-denominational. Its focus looks specifically at cultural differences between newer church plants and historical churches over 40 years old. For research, focus is primarily on large newer churches and smaller historical churches. Average age of congregation will not be a determining factor, but it is estimated that age of congregation may play a role in cultural differences. However, it is the intention of this research to discover and surmise without prejudice. The outcome of this project will affect both clergy and laity leaders of both old and new church cultures. Based on the workshop and interviews, socioeconomic circumstances play a limited role in the factors between the cultural gap. Neither urban or rural churches nor wealthy or poor churches appear to play a role in their willingness to work together between church cultures based on established age of church.

Root Causes

The first exercise of the Design Workshop investigated the core causation of the cultural DNA within the two identified groups in the NPO. Using an atomize exercise, the focus group identified the primary need systems that exist at the birth of both a church plant startup and historical church startup. Early needs of church plant systems include Location Team to identify space to rent, Set-Up Team, Service Teams (to support hospitality, A/V, Kids), Finance Team, and Lead Pastor. Early needs of historical church startups include Trustee Team to purchase property and supervise construction, Finance Team, Oversight Board for decision making, and Staff Board for selection and hiring Lead Pastor. After identifying adjectives, verbs and nouns describing the different cultures, the focus group summarized the distinctions: Church Plant = Serving/Non-Ownership, and Historical Church = Controlling/Ownership. Cultural differences between planted and historical churches, influenced by organizational structure, impose dissimilar expectations on leadership.

Therefore, the language of each group is filtered through diametric lenses, resulting in solutions that are antithetical.

Three Big Ideas

Upon executing a BrainWriting exercise followed by Dot Prioritizing the outcome, the ensuing three ideas emerged: Church Coaching Network for identifying existing church culture, Leadership Workshop for modeling Christ centeredness to church, On-Line Pastor Cohort for focus on vision, not problems.

Definition of 'Done'

If solutions to this NPO are implemented successfully, it would result in external focused leadership and congregations working together beyond suspicion to share ideas for church growth and wellness. (Solutions to this NPO implemented successfully would open the door to a shared vision of building trust that results in the tearing down walls of resistance. This work comes as a time where the number of smaller older churches being closed is growing rapidly. This work could allow generations that feel left behind to work through the loss that they are experiencing and see themselves as a vital part of the diverse Church working together for kingdom change. Younger generations today need both older established churches and newer churches to be available for them on their journey of discipleship. The benefit of this workshop is to ensure that no church gets left behind as we learn together what we need to hold on to and what we need to let go of as churches embrace a kingdom view.)

3 Concept Pitches

Concept 1

- Big Idea: Church Coaching Network for identifying existing church culture.
- Audience: The intended audience is pastors and church decision makers.
- NPO: Church culture determines the lens through which we view our needs and problems. Those needs, if improperly understood, result in inward focused churches, fragmentation, and ineffective leadership.
- Benefit: Identifying current culture sets the foundation for transparent leadership. Without understanding existing culture within the church, it renders efforts to labor together for common vision alignment impotent.
- Approach: Identify shepherds called with the giftedness and grace to walk alongside a church through the arduous task of identifying current church culture and being accountable for it.
- Risks: The risks attempting to identify culture, especially if it is toxic, include volatile disruption to the community environment. Additional risks include lack of endurance to complete change necessary, and failure to create a safe environment for the task at hand.

- Assumptions/Hypotheses: Church culture based on a sense of ownership and control will fail to follow Jesus to a place of obedience and humility.
- Benchmarks of Success:
 1. Changes in leadership structure that align with desired culture.
 2. Missional unity.
 3. Self-Awareness, empathy, and trust.
- Other Approaches: Other approaches that exist are on-line workshops that leadership teams can experience together. While this is not an ineffective approach, what sets this approach apart is more hands-on mentoring. This is accomplished via live on-line coaching or a hybrid solution both in person and on-line.

Concept 2

- Big Idea: Leadership Workshop for modeling Christ centeredness to church.
- Audience: The intended audience is the lead pastor and pastoral staff or key lay leaders.
- NPO: Toxic or fragmented culture can lead to worldly priorities instead of kingdom progress. As a result, misplaced identity leads to success measured in numbers versus changed lives.
- Benefit: Modeling Christ centeredness has a global impact throughout the church community. Alignment grounded in God's word builds unity, leading to mission focus that is Christocentric rather than program centric.
- Approach: Develop workshops that are delivered on-line or in person via a renewal retreat format. Workshop would include stressing healthy relationships, life balance in key domains, disciplines for deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Risks: Changes to Sunday morning preaching often leads to people leaving to find what feels comfortable. Loss of people feels like failure, requiring a commitment of leadership to support vision.
- Assumptions/Hypotheses: Churches who measure success by dollars received or number of seats filled will ultimately fail to make disciples who reflect the life of Jesus and become disciple makers.
- Benchmarks of Success:
 1. Wellness strategy for balanced living.
 2. Biblical homiletic preaching.
 3. Congregation that is deep in relationship with Christ and wide in service to others.
- Other Approaches: Books on this subject are also an effective tool and often used to develop a more Christ centered life. This approach is more relational and models the desired outcome.

Concept 3

- Big Idea: On-Line Pastor Cohort to focus on vision, not problems.
- Audience: The target audience is lead pastors at small to medium-sized churches.
- NPO: Dysfunctional church culture can inhibit and fragment vision clarity both in leadership and congregation.

- Benefit: Identifying a clear vision and communicating it throughout the organization with continuity will create a greater sense of purpose and unity.
- Approach: Offer a safe place for pastors to support and encourage one another to practice the discipline of hearing a vision from God and taking ownership of casting that vision throughout organization.
- Risks: Vision can fail when it becomes fragmented over time causing clarity to break down. Vision is hindered when it is too broad, and sense of purpose is not understood.
- Assumptions/Hypotheses: Vision that is not clear, too broad, unclear throughout leadership, and not held by the lead pastor, opens the door for pockets of ownership and control within the organization.
- Benchmarks of Success: 1. Leaders who develop leaders. 2. Small groups that split and multiply. 3. Vision that is repeatable throughout the organization.
- Other Approaches: Workshops are often used for helping pastors understand and develop vision. However, accountability and isolation become barriers to maintaining the endurance necessary for healthy leadership boundaries. This approach seeks to establish relationships to establish accountability and prevent isolation.

Design Workshop Stakeholders

Roles of Stakeholders: Licensed Practicing Therapist, Community Engagement Director at Christian Counseling Organization, Assimilation Director, Hospitality Pastor, Church Mediation Coach, Associate Pastor (12k Attendance), Lead Pastor (200 Attendance)

One-On-One Interviews

Roles of Interviews: Lead Pastor (300 Attendance), Business Executive (Christian), Worship Pastor (200 Attendance)

Key Biblical Passages

Biblical passages that I have used as a foundation and guide for my NPO are as follows:

Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." **We are not just called to make disciples, but to make disciples who understand the power within them.**

Acts 2:46-47 "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." **The early church didn't just meet in their homes in small groups. They also met in large gathering places and in doing so God added daily to their numbers.**

Mark 9:34-35 "But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."" **Without humility, leaders fail.**

Romans 12:3-5 "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." **We are called to work together.**

1 Timothy 6:20-21 "Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith." **Leaders are called to lead.**

Proverbs 18:1 "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment." **Isolation is the sanctuary of the enemy.**

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Barna Group. "38% of U.S. Pastors Have Thought About Quitting Full-Time Ministry in the Past Year." Accessed December 14, 2021. <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being/>.

This article presents a summary of "The State of Pastor" report based on surveys among 413 and 507 Protestant Senior Pastors conducted in January 2021 and again in October 2021. Barna's data shows that between January 2021 and October 2021, pastors considering quitting their vocation rose from 29% to 38%. Perhaps more significant is the data showing that 46% of pastors under the age of 45 are ready to leave full-time ministry. Furthermore, data shows that only one in three pastors surveyed is considered "healthy" in terms of Well-Being metrics. Barna, a leading research company who provides statistical data to understand cultural trends related to Christian values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors since 1984, conducted the surveys. This important research points to a disturbing trend of increasing frustration and anxiety among church leadership. Such data supports the urgency to understand the role culture plays in creating unhealthy environments in churches and its impact on relationship both within a church family and between leaders of other churches.

Bailey, Boyd. *The Spiritual Life of a Leader: A God-Centered Leadership Style*. Harvest House Publishers, 2021.

In the book, *The Spiritual Life of a Leader*, author Boyd Bailey lays out a compelling and practical approach to becoming a Christ centered leader. Bailey asserts that the best leaders have a high level of spiritual maturity. In Bailey's view, they enjoy an intimate relationship with God that spills out into their leadership style. To illustrate this position, Bailey explores three key areas, spiritual lifestyle, spiritual qualities, and spiritual disciplines, while maintaining that relationship with God the Trinity is paramount throughout one's leadership journey. Bailey has authored dozens of books on seeking God and leading God centered lives. Baily, founder of Wisdom Hunters, distributes a daily devotional email to over 100,000 readers. What is significant about this most recent work by Bailey is the diversity of his sources. From Spurgeon to Wesley, Nouwen to Willard, Bailey offers a rich and practical resource, intentionally directing the reader to center their lives on Jesus Christ. This book provides an exceptional blueprint that supports the idea that shifting culture begins with the leaders of the organization. Church wellness comes out of its leaders modeling Christ in a way that's life altering with life giving changes to church culture while promoting vision clarity.

Barringer, Laura McKnight, and Tish Harrison Warren. *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2020.

A Church Called Tov, explores the tragic outcomes of toxic church culture and leadership. As members of Willow Creek Church for over 20 years, authors McKnight and Barringer focus their work on the effects of toxic leadership, citing the circumstances of church founder Bill Hybels leaving the landmark mega-church under allegations of moral impropriety. What is important about

this work is the value of their story, as they witnessed the signs of leadership left unchecked and the toxic erosion to one of the most influential contemporary churches in history. McKnight is professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary and has authored over 80 books including award-winning *The Jesus Creed*. Barringer is an elementary school teacher who co-authored, *Sharing God's Love: The Jesus Creed for Children*. Their personal experience is vital to record and understand the progression of toxic leadership over time. However, it places too much focus on the actions of a person, or people who sit on a board. It spends so much time placing blame, the exceptional examples of culture that is healthy seem to get lost through the lens of lingering hurt. It isn't until the last paragraph of the book do they ask, "What can we do?" Regardless of its weaknesses, this book serves as an unprecedented witness and testimony for any work that will focus on solutions for redeeming the pandemic of toxic culture in the church today.

Cloud, Henry. *Boundaries for Leaders: Results, Relationships, and Being Ridiculously in Charge*. New York: Harper Business, 2013.

Boundaries for Leaders builds on the phenomenal success of its predecessor, *Boundaries*. It sets out to focus on practical solutions to identify where, as leaders, people whom we work with and for have overstepped their influence on our emotions. In business, if unchecked, productivity suffers, toxic workplaces ensue, and broken relationships inhibit team performance and creativity. *Boundaries* released in 1992 by Henry Cloud and John Townsend sold over 4 million copies and still considered the authority on helping people overcome anxiety, overwhelm, co-dependency, and setting safe limits from allowing others to control your time and thinking. Henry Cloud remains one of the top Christian leadership coaches and authors today. The work that Cloud has done in this book is the benchmark for identifying and restoring healthy relationships in organizations. What is important is the emphasis on self-care, which is a vital component of any work helping leaders dealing with isolation and organizational disfunction. Nothing is done outside of relationships. *Boundaries for Leaders* sets the groundwork for helping churches and pastors heal and become healthy organizations empowered to walk through changes both for themselves and their church family.

Nieuwhof, Carey. *At Your Best: How to Get Time, Energy, and Priorities Working in Your Favor*. WaterBrook, 2021.

Unhealthy relationships are not just the ones we have with others we encounter daily. They are also the unhealthy expectations we have on our calendar and our time. This is the premise behind *At Your Best*. Accomplishing what you set out to do, leverage your energy, realize your priorities, and make intentional changes to the way you plan and manage your time. Ultimately, for the author, it's not about how much you're getting done, it's about who you're becoming. Carey Nieuwhof, author of *At Your Best*, has written several bestseller leadership books for the Christian community. A popular conference speaker, Nieuwhof writes one of today's most influential leadership podcasts, and his online content is accessed by leaders over 1.5 million times a month. What Nieuwhof does so well is systematically identifying the pitfalls of blaming others for feeling overwhelmed and ineffectiveness at completing tasks. Carey looks at approaching daily work activities in blocks of energy by finding your green zone for being at your best doing what you're best at. Church leaders

are called by Jesus to follow him and bring others along. Coaching church leaders to prioritize their call and maintain balance in life is a vital part of walking alongside communities of faith on a journey of healing and building healthy relationships.

Appendices

Design Workshop Description

Design Workshop held on November 4th, 2021 from 9:00am to 12:30pm. Location was held at a large mega-church in Bradenton, FL.

The following participants were in attendance:

- Associate Pastor: large non-denominational mega-church main campus
- Assimilation Director: large non-denominational mega-church main campus
- Hospitality Pastor: large non-denominational mega-church main campus
- Church Mediation Coach: pastor coaching network
- Senior Pastor: historic non-denominational church
- Licensed Practicing Therapist: therapist, coach, conference speaker
- Community Engagement Director: Christian counseling organization

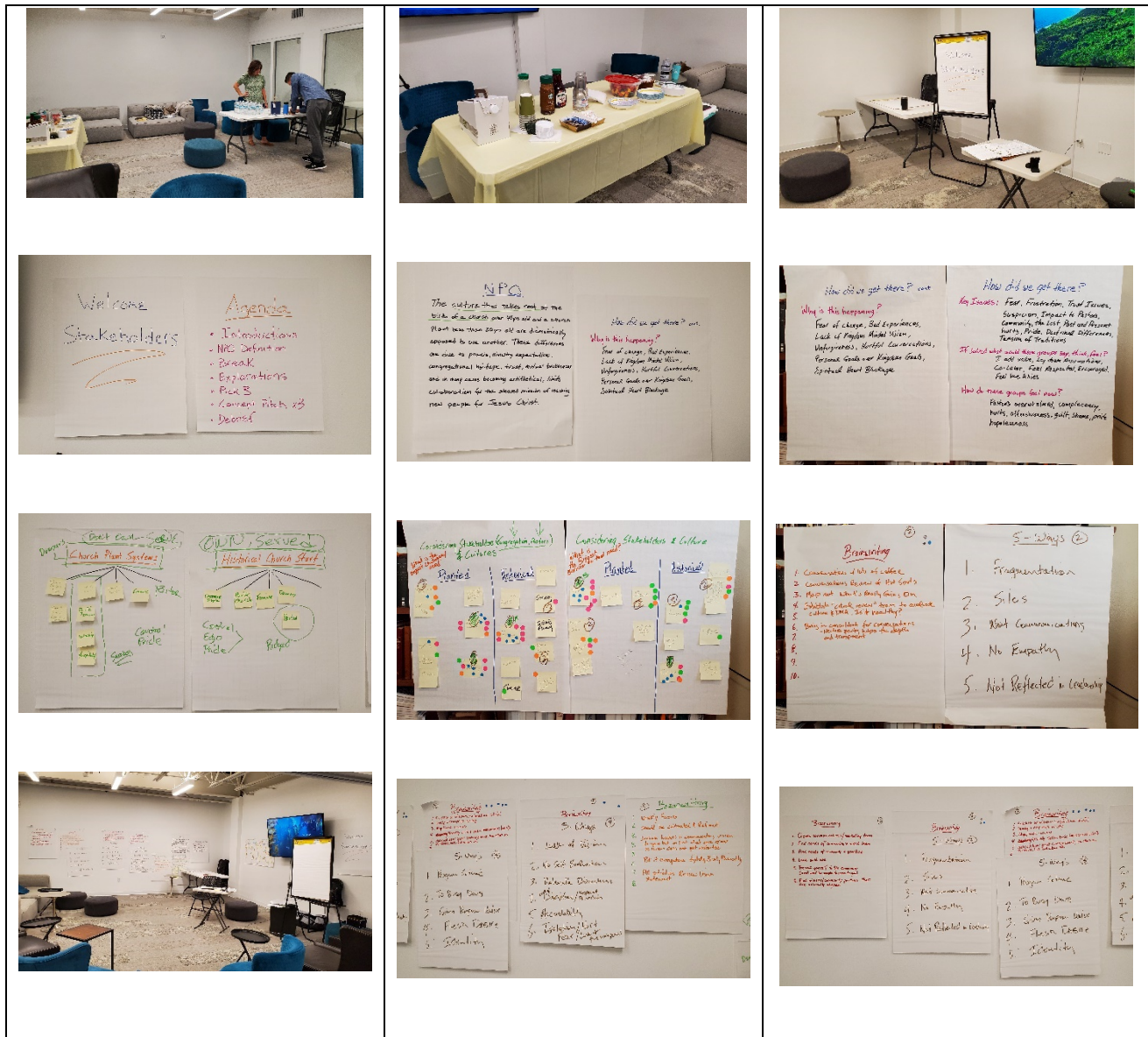
The workshop was held in a large room with comfortable couches and chairs. During the workshop, a light breakfast, coffee, snacks, and drinks were available. There were two scheduled breaks. After introducing myself and the purpose of the workshop, I shared the agenda. The workshop began with an icebreaker of everyone sharing their name, their ministry, and what activity they would do if they had more time. Ground rules were shared and expectations explained. Included in the welcome was communicating that the purpose was to build upon the NPO which the previous workshop helped developed and design the framework of solutions to the NPO.

The first task was an Atomize exercise to identify primary need systems for startup churches. The stakeholders then proceeded with three exercises that involved looking at questions and using sticky notes to put their answers on easel paper adhered to the wall and sticky dots for prioritization. Next, was a Challenge/Need exercise to identify similarities and differences between the NPO subjects. Followed by a BrainWriting exercise for digging deep into the challenges and needs. Group members then Dot Prioritized the ideas and executed a 5-Whys exercise for a richer understanding of the issues. The final exercise was a Napkin Pitch overview to gain clarity on how to execute the final three ideas to explore as solutions to the NPO.

On a Likert Scale of 1-5, I would give this workshop a 5. I strongly agree that this workshop was effective in helping define solutions that may have been unclear otherwise. Particularly, the ability to work as a group from diverse backgrounds not only in their current vocations, but the diversity of their previous vocations. Identifying systems in place during church starts of both categories was invaluable, as it tied church culture to church values. The only limitation of the exercises was time.

However, extending the workshop time would not be the solution, as most attendees were getting tired and less creative at the end. While an additional workshop could dig deeper into execution of the final three ideas, it would be more effective to explore details and come back with a broader understanding of the solutions from a technical perspective. Overall, the results of the Design Workshop are very satisfying and thorough enough to move forward.

DESIGN WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION



ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

Subject: NPO Research Design Workshop - November 4th, 2021

Dear Stakeholder,

Thank you for your valuable participation in my workshop. I am grateful for the time that everyone took out of their day and the travel necessary for you to be there. One thing that stood out to me was the candor and transparency that was shared by everyone in an extremely supportive way. Perhaps that was a key takeaway. Pastors are willing and ready to sit together from a broad ecumenical pool to discuss Kingdom issues respectfully. Imagine the possibilities!

As you recall, we began with an NPO (Need, Problem, or Opportunity) identified by me based on my experience and heart for making a way to lift one another up for the Glory of God. The statement was as you recall:

"The culture that takes root at the birth of a church over 40yrs old and a church plant less than 20yrs old are diametrically opposed to one another. These differences due to praxis, ministry expectations, congregational heritage, trust, mutual brokenness and in many cases becoming antithetical, limits collaboration for the shared mission of reaching new people for Jesus Christ."

With your help, we identified two primary cultural distinctions: Planted Church: Serving, Non-Ownership vs. Historical Church: Served, Ownership. While there was agreement on the NPO the focus group from last year developed through their work, there also appeared to be a need to further explore what happens when a planted church exists beyond 20yrs. Do the differences become blurred? Is there a possibility for Cultural Creep in the newer church?

The heart of our work together was identifying 3 major areas to focus on. 1. Helping churches establish and communicate vision, 2. Develop coaching and tools to help churches stay God centered, 3. Help churches identify current culture and DNA. If you have any thoughts about our work together, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Please accept this gift as a sincere thank you. I pray during this challenging season it will serve to help you focus on daily gratitude in your ministry. If you already have this practice, pass it on to the Timothy in your life! I look forward to staying in touch with you during my journey on this project. I pray this work could lead to healing and revitalization for churches both planted and historical.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS DOCUMENTATION

Interviewee A – Lead Pastor (non-denominational church of 300), walking through a merger with another denominational church that asked to be folded in Interviewee A's church. Request was accepted if they submit to their Bi-Laws.

- We notice there is more mistrust in their church
- We didn't want to come in and dishonor them
- Previous pastor with outside church, "I felt hurt/cynical and beat up. There was a heavy weight."

Response to Design Workshop findings:

- Workshop findings are spot on
- That's the way they did things (referring to historical church culture)
- Agree: Structure determines culture
- Bad structure can make good people do bad things

Interviewee B – Business Executive (Christian), does marketplace ministry with other business leaders.

- The workshop findings sound accurate
- I have a perspective of wasting time in church leadership
- There must be a willingness to value the past, but not live in it
- We did both contemporary and traditional
- Grace in church is hard to come by
- You should not be penalized in church, but you are
- We should be working alongside the brokenness of others
- There should be accountability, grace, and a journey towards holiness

Interviewee C – Worship Pastor (denominational church of 150), working through walking their church through changes.

- I agree with the reality of workshop findings
- I can see both sides because we have been walking through it
- Identifying loss and grief is right on the mark
- Because of structure changes we are in the cusp between culture of planted vs. historical
- We were a country club before changes
- People use tithes to control and prevent change
- We lost people in the transition
- Love the move towards Christ centered and less program driven

- Pastor cohort is a great idea! Agree there is often fragmentation when communicating vision
- Would love to know more about how a church moves from one culture to another
- Discipleship must be core to a culture changing process
- Current lead pastor has hard time letting go of the past

Appendix D—Milestone 4 Design Research Report

Prototype Summary and Findings

Prototype Description

Option 1 – Book

BOOK TITLE: *Crossing The Jordan Together: Rediscovering the common mission among the tribes of Jesus Followers.*

Description: The culture of religion has divided the tribes of Christianity. These cultural differences over time make collaboration difficult because of diverse expectations for discipleship. However, this is not a new story for the people of God. As recorded in Joshua 4, the tribes of Israel still did not have it all together after 40 years, but they arrived at a single obstacle as one people moving forward only by God's grace. Once across, the door behind was closed with no going back. Now it was up to them to get it right. The land was not the blessing; the blessing was crossing the Jordan together.

In 2020, the sound of church doors shutting echoed around the world. For a moment, all the churches across the globe stood together side by side at a point in time as equals. Much like the tribes of Israel arriving at the river Jordan, the church was about to step into an unknown future. Suddenly, every church was humbled by reporting an attendance number of zero, but God's promise of hope ahead has never changed. Now, it's time to step through the threshold in unity while discovering a new common language of what it means to live together as disciples through Kingdom Living.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Introduction: The unexpected journey.

Chapter 1: New Beginnings: Seeking normal.

Chapter 2: Exposed: Who's in charge?

Chapter 3: Non-Linier: Reengineering the process.

Chapter 4: Outside The Walls: The business of ministry.

Chapter 5: Servant Follower: Leading from within.

Chapter 6: Kingdom Living: Reframing discipleship.

Chapter 7: Crossing Together: Getting your feet wet.

BOOK PROTOTYPE SAMPLES:

INTRODUCTION CHAPTER – a nine-page sample of the introduction chapter describing the thesis and objectives of the book. It establishes the story of the people of Israel crossing the

Jordan in Joshua 4 as the metaphor for the tribes of the church today in a post-pandemic world. It outlines the goal of using a lifelong personal journey, as a parallel to the thesis of a reframed discipleship model described as "Kingdom Living."

CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS – each chapter title page briefly describes the theme and aim of the corresponding chapter by illustrating a life experience for a season and connecting it to a component of discipleship that builds through the lens of a personal life story.

Option 2 – Website

DOMAIN: www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church

DESCRIPTION: "Resourcing the Tribes of Jesus Followers." The purpose of the website is to provide Christian discipleship resources to churches of all sizes. Resources would include coaching for pastors to identify out-of-balance life domains and goal setting towards balance. It would also include emotional support through a cohort community which would address the struggle of isolation. Additionally, coaching and other discipleship resources would be made available to both church laity and the public, positioning the church as a resource to the community.

NAVIGATION:

- About: (purpose)
- Kingdom Living: (learning resources) Service, Study, Health, Finance, Mission
- Coaching: Goal Targeting, Pastor Support, Personal Finance, Personal Health, Kingdom Living
- Tribes: Resource Links, Neighborhood Networks (connecting locally and regionally)

BLOG

CONTACT

WEBSITE PROTOTYPE SAMPLES:

- Homepage Design and Navigation: An indication of website vision and function.
- Coaching Promotion Page on Kingdom Living: This promotion page will outline the pain points and opportunities to reframe discipleship in a fresh way that is outside the current traditional approach. Workshops would be offered to church leadership teams in a hybrid model with both pre-recorded and live streaming interaction to help instruct and develop the implementation plan.

NPO Statement

"The culture that takes root at the birth of a church over 40 years old is diametrically opposed to a church plant less than 20 years old. Without a process of cultural awareness on both parts, it can lead to hurt and distrust limiting collaboration for the shared mission of reaching new people for Jesus Christ. An opportunity exists for mutual self-discovery through a collaborative effort to walk

humbly together in reframing discipleship and what it means to follow Jesus Christ. In this way, no one sits at the table as the expert, thus leading to a shared vision of renewal.”

Research Questions

Book

- a. Do you feel that there is a need for different denominational and non-denominational churches to partner together and learn from one another to make a kingdom impact in their communities?
- b. Have you ever experienced or witnessed tension between newer large churches and historical churches?
- c. Do you agree with this statement: The culture of religion has divided the tribes of Christianity. These cultural differences over time have made collaboration difficult due to diverse expectations for discipleship and purpose.
- d. Do you agree that there is an opportunity to bring people together by working on something new that requires innovative input from everyone where no one is the perceived expert?
- e. Do you see value in broadening the definition of discipleship to be more inclusive of non-spiritual life domains such as work, health, finance?
- f. What do you like most and/or least about what you reviewed?

WEBSITE

- a. Do you see a value in making resources available to churches of different sizes that offer support to pastors coming out of the challenges of Covid and isolation?
- b. Do you see a value in offering church leaders discipleship strategies targeting multiple life domains in a post Christendom culture beyond occasional church events or programs?
- c. Do you see a value in helping people understand that their faith life is not separate from the other life domains of their life?
- d. Do you see a value in making the following Christian coaches available to church members and non-church members in your neighborhood? If Yes, check all that apply.
☐ Financial
☐ Health & Wellbeing
- e. What do you like most and/or least about what you reviewed?

FINAL ASSESSMENT

- a. Any suggestions to make these prototypes stronger?
- b. Which prototype do you feel is the one that should be prioritized?
 - ☐ Website
 - ☐ Book
 - ☐ Both seem equal
 - ☐ Neither

Assessment Benchmarks

1. 80% positive responses to the new paradigm of discipleship.
2. 80% positive responses from church leaders who see themselves as utilizing ecumenical resources and opportunities for collaboration with other churches.
3. 80% positive interest in understanding further how introducing a broader approach to discipleship as “Kingdom Living” across personal domains can create new opportunities for churches to work together in their community.

Participant Descriptions

Participants included church leaders both in vocational and lay ministry. Participants were selected from large, planted churches less than 20 years old and smaller historical churches over 40 years old. Demographics for participants were pastors, church staff, church lay leaders, Christian counselors, and Christian tertiary educators. They were all adults who served or have served in a Christian context in both paid and unpaid positions. Participants were all experienced leaders in their communities.

Learning Summary

Of the 15 invited participants, 12 responded to the questionnaire. While not all participants filled in the open response fields, those who did shared positive feedback on both the project overall and the approach of communicating the thesis through personal story. All respondents responded ‘yes’ to website questions, except for one ‘no’ in response to making support to pastors available to deal with isolation. In response to the book, only 3 out of 12 responders said they had not experienced tension between large and small churches, however all responders said that there is a cultural division between the tribes of Christianity that makes collaboration difficult. When asked which prototype stood out to move forward, no respondents said ‘none’, 5 respondents chose ‘both seem equal’, 6 respondents chose ‘website’ as their preference, and 1 respondent chose ‘book’. One respondent shared, “There’s a clear need for these kinds of conversations, and the website got me excited. The front page had me wanting more, for sure.”

Important Discovery

Several shared it pleased them that my story, which has at times been a difficult journey, is being used in a way that honors the mission of Jesus Christ. All respondents, except for two who responded 'financial' only, indicated that both 'financial' and 'health & wellbeing' resources are beneficial to those who the church serves. One respondent shared that many churches are still trying to "get back to normal" before moving forward. This learning validates the need to help churches understand that no one needs to catch up. No one has been left behind. Every church big or small, old or new seeks to discover the normal that lies ahead. As Jesus shares in John 6:44, God draws the church forward to discover the joy of a new beginning.

Background Research Essay on the Emerging Solution

The NPO

From the onset of this research, the driving force continues to be the cooperation and sharing of resources and support between local churches of different tribes. Qualitative focus groups conducted over the past two years with pastors and lay leaders of both church plants and historical churches show the need for collaboration between church leaders across tribes is essential as they enter a new season of ministry. The need to work together for fresh approaches to reaching the lost has accelerated during the transition into a post-Christendom culture because of the changing paradigm of community since the global Covid-19 shutdown. One research participant shared in a follow-up survey, "The acknowledgement of a changing paradigm and to reframe what it is to live a Christian life. Many churches are like a deer in the headlights right now and the right coaching is greatly needed."

In the fall of 2021, a focus group of church leaders from diverse church backgrounds investigated the core causation of the cultural DNA within the two identified groups (historical churches over 40 years old and non-denominational churches less than 20 years old) in the NPO. The focus group identified the primary organizational systems that exist at the birth of both a church plant startup and historical church startup. Early organization of historical church startups includes a trustee team to purchase property and supervise construction, finance team, oversight board for decision making, and staff board for selection and hiring a Lead Pastor. In contrast, the organization of a church plant includes teams focused on set-up, tear down, hospitality, a finance team, and leadership team. The Lead Pastor is the planter whose oversight comes from the planting organization external to the church. After identifying adjectives, verbs and nouns describing the different cultures, the focus group summarized the distinctions as: Church Plant = Non-Ownership/Serving (gathering spaces are rented, pastor initiates plant and chooses team, most all attendees serve as a necessity to host guests), and Historical Church = Ownership/Controlling (gathering spaces are bought or built, pastor is hired with internal oversight, serving is focused on internal needs of the organization). Cultural differences between planted and historical churches,

influenced by organizational structure, impose dissimilar expectations on leadership. Therefore, the language of each church group is filtered through diametric lenses, resulting in solutions that are antithetical to one another.

Upon executing a BrainWriting exercise followed by Dot Prioritizing the outcome, the ensuing ideas emerged: Church Coaching Network for identifying existing church culture, Leadership Workshop for modeling Christ centeredness to church, and On-Line Pastor Cohort for focus on vision, not problems.

While culture is a barrier to communication between churches, addressing culture head on can be difficult and can become volatile to already fractured relationships. Not that culture shouldn't be part of the conversation, however, addressing culture head on can easily turn into a divisive approach rather than a desired cooperative approach.

The focus groups of diverse leaders centered on improving collaboration. It was an important study of how to learn the language of culture to help people understand their 'why.' When referring to a church's 'why' it is meant to explain the vision and purpose of the call God has placed on that faith community beyond the mission to make disciples as instructed by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20. As churches gather ecumenically, church leaders assume everyone understands the 'why' in the same way. The past two years of research would say otherwise. Culture that develops over time through the value placed on service to others and organizational structure defines a vocabulary with specific internalized meanings. Our mission might be the same, but how we understand it through the lens of our 'why' is different, thus causing frustration.

There is a unique opportunity today in this post-pandemic period to come together as leaders both inside the church and ecumenically, seeking new ways to pivot ministry that align with the mission of following the incarnate movement of Jesus Christ. One such opportunity is the reframing of discipleship. In this way, churches working together would be required to enter the conversation disadvantaged in some capacity because no one group can entirely lean on experience to define what works in a post-pandemic world. No one arrives at the table as the expert. The semiotic process of seeing the signs ahead humbles everyone, as they are informed by the past, discovering together what needs to be done in a time such as this.

The Church Wanders

"And as for your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it. But as for you, turn, and journey into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea."⁹⁹
Deuteronomy 1:39-40

⁹⁹ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Dt 1:39-40.

The years of wandering have divided both the people of the church and the leaders of their tribes. Ironically, what appeared to be the darkest year for the 21st century church may have opened the door of opportunity, with Christ waiting on the other side.

For the Israelites, what should have taken 40 days turned into 40 years, much like that of the church today, filled with complaining, doubt, significant loss, and fear. Like the church, the tribes of Israel couldn't cross over into this new beginning without God taking the first step. "And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap."¹⁰⁰ Now, as it was with the tribes of Israel, the church is called to embark together beyond the marker of this shared experience. Unified by our humility, moving ever forward into the uncharted territory of a post pandemic world. What church leaders discover will forever be the altar of witness. "We will use these stones to build a memorial. In the future your children will ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' Then you can tell them, 'They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the Lord's Covenant went across.' These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever."¹⁰¹

The Mission of God

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."¹⁰² John 10:10

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."¹⁰³ Matthew 28:19-20

Followers of the way, as it was called during the first several centuries, were focused on doing life together. Jesus followers ate together, worked together, shared finances, served one another, and worshiped together. In his book, *Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World*,¹⁰⁴ Gerald Sittser writes of second century theologian Clement of Alexandria's ideals of discipleship. Sittser highlights Alexandria's inclusive holistic approach, "Christians followed a program suitable for discipleship, which resulted in "moral loveliness." And in the case of those who have been trained according to this influence: their gait in walking, their sitting at table, their

¹⁰⁰ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jos 3:13.

¹⁰¹ Tyndale House Publishers, Holy Bible: New Living Translation (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), Jos 4:6-7.

¹⁰² The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 10:10.

¹⁰³ Ibid. Mt 28:19-20

¹⁰⁴ Gerald L. Sittser, *Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World* (Brazos Press, 2019).

food, their sleep, their going to bed, their regimen, and the rest of their mode of life, acquire a superior dignity. For such a training as is pursued by the Word is not overstrained, but is of the right tension."¹⁰⁵ Discipleship was a theology of living where faith was not a segment of life, but the center of all life. Stephen W. Smith, author, pastor, church planter, and founder of Potter's Inn, a Christian ministry devoted to the work of spiritual formation and the care of the soul states, "As a doctor, Luke recorded insights about health and lifestyle issues. He was concerned with showing us how Jesus lived, not just His teachings. Luke's use of Greek is excellent, as scholars have noted, and shows that he was an expert in accurately describing the Jesus way."¹⁰⁶

However, disciplemakers today avoid discussing money, work, and limit the discussion to tithing once a week. Health is reduced to prayer for healing to fix what is broken after the fact rather than an honest discussion about healthy living. Ben Witherington, prolific author, a research fellow at Cambridge University, and currently Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary argues, "Yet, upon reflection, I think I know the reason we don't much find Christian writing about eating and drinking—the problem is, many Christians have seriously guilty consciences (especially Western Christians) about their eating and drinking habits, and they don't want to be reminded of what they ought to be doing."¹⁰⁷

Barna Research, in their March 2022, State of the Church¹⁰⁸ report, "recommends that church leaders understand their own capacity to promote holistic health in their congregations and become more aware of how spiritual formation and church attendance have meaningful connections to the flourishing of individuals." Adding, "Most pastors (80%) agree there is a difference between financial stability and financial flourishing. They're also aware of the discipleship needs surrounding money as many Christians struggle to connect their spiritual life to financial decisions." Furthermore, Barna states, "Leaders who dismiss the importance of well-being risk missing a key dimension of discipleship. Past and recent studies show that U.S. adults who are plugged into congregations fare better than those who do not, and there are multiple reasons worship communities might provide psychological, social, financial and health benefits to participants, directly or indirectly."

Church culture plays an integral role in overall congregant wellbeing and is a determining factor in building a flourishing community. As recent research and second century practices align, it clearly supports working together ecumenically to discover how a new understanding of discipleship can

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 161.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen W. Smith, *The Jesus Life: Eight Ways to Recover Authentic Christianity*, Reprint edition (David C Cook, 2012). 55.

¹⁰⁷ Ben Witherington III, *The Rest of Life: Rest, Play, Eating, Studying, Sex from a Kingdom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 65.

¹⁰⁸ "Flourishing People | Barna Access," accessed March 10, 2022, <https://barna.gloo.us/reports/soyc-chapter-1>.

be life giving to both church and neighboring communities. This research tests the reframing of discipleship and the church's role in making disciples through two different prototype concepts. Each prototype seeks different ways to broaden what it means to grow as a Christ follower and the role of the church to teach Kingdom Living. A holistic view of walking together in faith, supporting one another in our vocation, finances, and health. Serving together locally and missionally across the world. While centering on maintaining loving relationships at its core through prayer, worship, and generosity.

Where Do We Go?

EMERGING SOLUTION 1: KINGDOM LIVING

Emerging Solution 1 is a book focused on the background behind reframing the conversation around discipleship. It centers on seeing discipleship through the story of one's personal journey. Seeing Jesus in the day-to-day. Reaching a point when one begins to live a Pentecost filled life as witnessed in Acts 3:4-6. Expectant of the miracles seen through the living Holy Spirit within. Its title, *Crossing the Jordan Together*, is a metaphor of the church and its tribes who arrived unexpectedly at a point in history at the start of a pandemic shutdown.

This solution invites the reader to consider an inductive look at what Jesus implied when he instructs followers to make disciples and teach others as he taught them. The book aims to redirect the focus on discipleship toward first century practices when the Christian church was in its infancy. It looks at the value of large churches worshiping together with small churches and presents a model of the Pentecost movement witnessed in Acts 2:42-47. It further explores why the church today avoids life domains outside the current spiritual paradigm. Through the lens of personal story, this book offers lessons and illustrations to begin the conversation. Emerging Solution 1 is an invitation to sit at the table, break bread, and discover what the Holy Spirit reveals through Jesus Christ as the church crosses the Jordan together.

What Do We Do?

EMERGING SOLUTION 2: KINGDOM WITHOUT WALLS

Emerging Solution 2 is a website offering solutions to kingdom living available to the Christian community outside the walls of the church. The name of the website and its domain is Kingdom Without Walls. The mission is to offer opportunities for church leaders to work collaboratively in workshops intended to coach churches on reframing discipleship in a way that looks holistically at the life of the disciple.

One strength of this solution is that it will also offer cohorts for pastors to address the isolation many pastors feel post-pandemic shut down. In the Barna Group, "The State of Pastor"¹⁰⁹ report. Barna's data shows that between January 2021 and October 2021, pastors considering quitting their vocation rose from 29% to 38%. Perhaps more significant is the data showing that 46% of pastors under the age of 45 are ready to leave full-time ministry. Data indicates that only one in three pastors surveyed is considered "healthy" in terms of well-being metrics. This important research points to a disturbing trend of increasing frustration and anxiety among church leadership. Such data supports the urgency to understand the role culture plays in creating unhealthy environments in churches and its impact on relationships both within a church family and between leaders of other churches. Laura McKnight Barringer, and Tish Harrison Warren in their book, *A Church Called Tov*¹¹⁰, share their personal story about how a megachurch, Willow Creek, was crushed when leadership experienced moral failure. What is important about this work is the value of their story, as they witnessed the signs of leadership left unchecked and the toxic erosion to one of the most influential contemporary churches in history. Experiences like these illuminates how important pastor health is to the church and the kingdom. Emerging Solution 2 is a practical approach to make resources available to gather church leaders for relationship building towards a fresh look at discipleship and offering healthy solutions to the growing anxiety in the lives of pastors.

MVP (Most Viable Prototype)

The website, Solution 2, received the most encouragement for prioritizing to move forward. This was an expected outcome because the site offers immediate solutions to both pastors and churches. One respondent shared this about what they liked most: "The acknowledgement of a changing paradigm and to reframe what it is to live a Christian life. Many churches are like a deer in the headlights right now and the right coaching is greatly needed."

The book, Solution 1, induces the reader to discover a deeper understanding of the 'why' behind the need to reframe discipleship and its justification supported by the practices of the early church. Taking into consideration that over 40% of respondents considered the two prototypes equal in importance, I am choosing Solution 1 as the MVP. The desire to use it as a vehicle to share the research behind the work and create a relationship behind the motive to surrender our lives both spiritually and physically to Jesus Christ is compelling. This quote by one respondent summarizes it best, "I liked the thoughtfulness of the topics and focus - they are well rounded and timely. I liked Brian sharing his experiences (in the book) and they connected with me." The key word here is "connect." The prayer of Christ says it best: "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may

¹⁰⁹ "38% of U.S. Pastors Have Thought About Quitting Full-Time Ministry in the Past Year," Barna Group, accessed July 31, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being/>.

¹¹⁰ Laura McKnight Barringer and Tish Harrison Warren, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Tyndale Momentum, 2020).

be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.”¹¹¹ Leonard Sweet, one of the most sought-after speakers on religion today, a prolific author, who often appears on the "50 Most Influential Christians in America" listings, and professor of Portland Seminary's doctoral program, "Semiotics, Church, and Culture," most eloquently states, "The story of Christianity didn't take shape behind pulpits or on altars or in books. No, the story of Christianity takes shape around tables, as people face one another as equals, telling stories, sharing memories, enjoying food with one another.”¹¹² By moving forward with Solution 1, relationships become the story, not just the solution.

¹¹¹ Tyndale House Publishers, Holy Bible: New Living Translation (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), Jn 17:22-23.

¹¹² Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* (NavPress, 2015). 4-5.

Working Bibliography

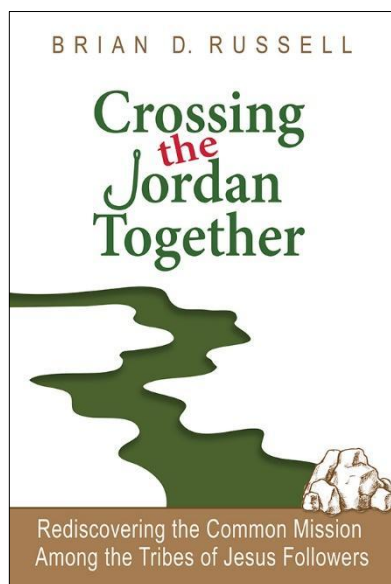
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Appendices

Book Samples

Prototype PDF File: <https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church/crossingthejordanttogether>

Sample Screenshots:



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Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: New Beginnings.....	10
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Introduction

THE UNPREDICTABLE JOURNEY
The Church Reborn.

In 2020, the sound of church doors shutting echoed around the world. For a brief moment, all the tribes were sitting at the same table drinking from the cup of humility. Every church, big and small, suddenly shared all things in common through the silence of our sanctuaries and auditoriums. The ushers and the hospitality teams were nowhere to be seen. The attendance gap between the mega-church and the small church was reduced to zero. A global pandemic became the great equalizer, bringing the church to its knees. Just perhaps, that is exactly where we needed to be.

What was expected to last weeks turned into unprecedented months. Like the twelve tribes of Israel arriving at the river Jordan together, the church was now about to cross over into a future unseen. No one was an expert on what was to come for the church. For the first time since Pentecost, the church was born again, now positioned to work together

1

Chapter 4

OUTSIDE THE WALLS
The business of ministry.

Now I found myself on the streets. Not literally but as a business owner teaching businesspeople how to be communicators. Surprisingly, God showed me how to take the business of ministry to the streets. Marketplace ministry was to be my new home.

13

Chapter 6

KINGDOM LIVING
Reframing discipleship.

When did faith become a domain in our lives alongside health, finance, marriage, social relationships and serving the church? It's time to reframe discipleship. When faith rules all life domains it's called 'kingdom living.' To be a thriving church is defined by people who are in pursuit of faithfully giving all their life domains to Jesus.

15

Chapter 7

CROSSING TOGETHER
Getting your feet wet.

Suddenly, in 2020, all churches were made equal both big and small. Regardless of attendance in the thousands or dozens all churches found themselves with a Sunday morning count of zero. Everyone was the same. For the first time in recent history, the doors of the church were shut. Now together we arrive at the same spot much like the tribes of Israel when they arrived at the Jordan on the edge of the promised land. But first, they had to get their feet wet before the waters would part. Together we are entering a renewed baptism discovering what it means to see the signs of Jesus who has been patiently waiting for the church to catch up.

16

Website Samples

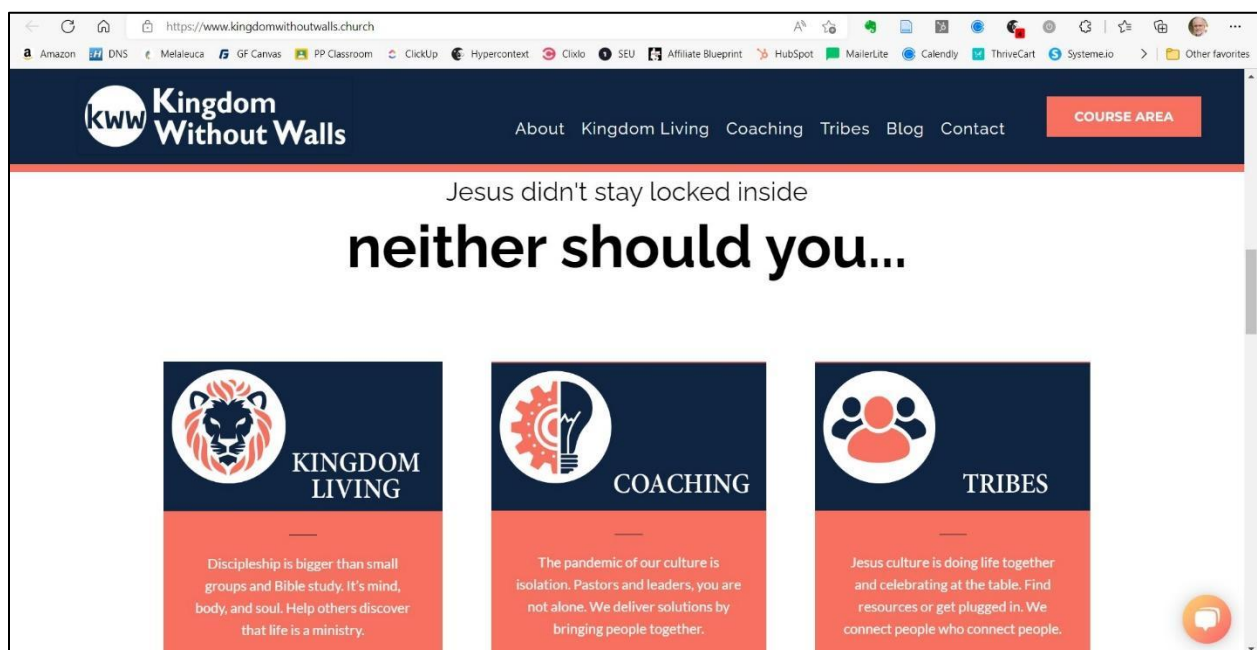
Homepage Link: <https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church>

Kingdom Living Workshop Link: <https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church/kingdomliving>

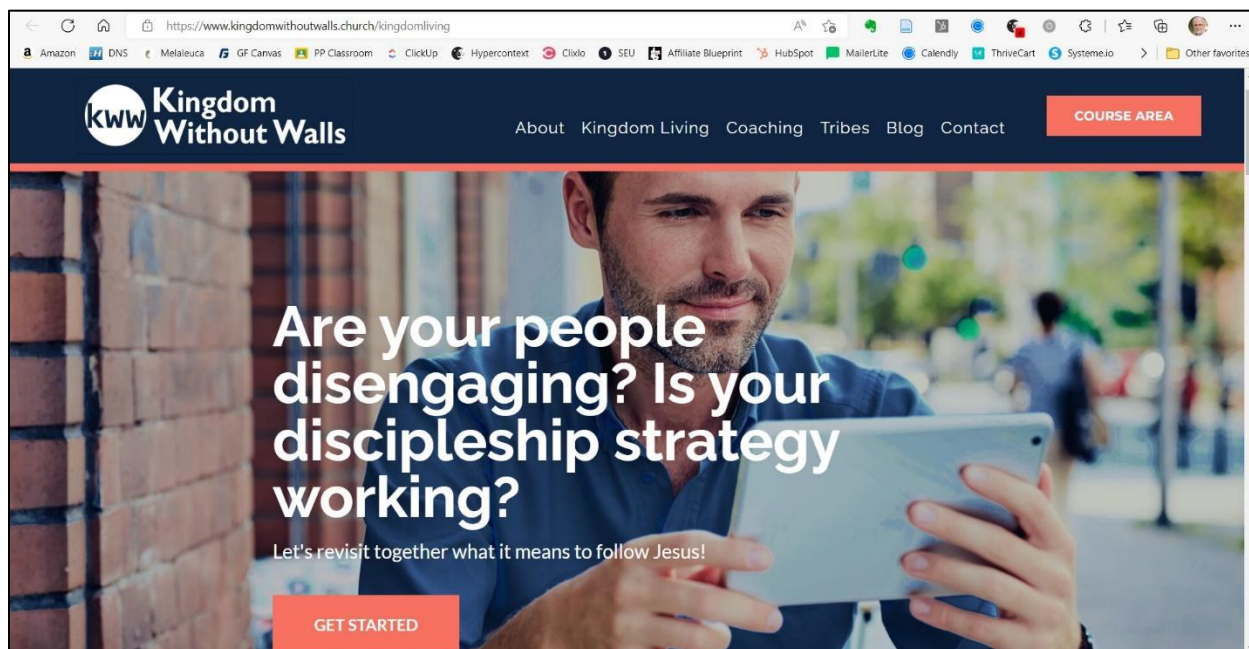
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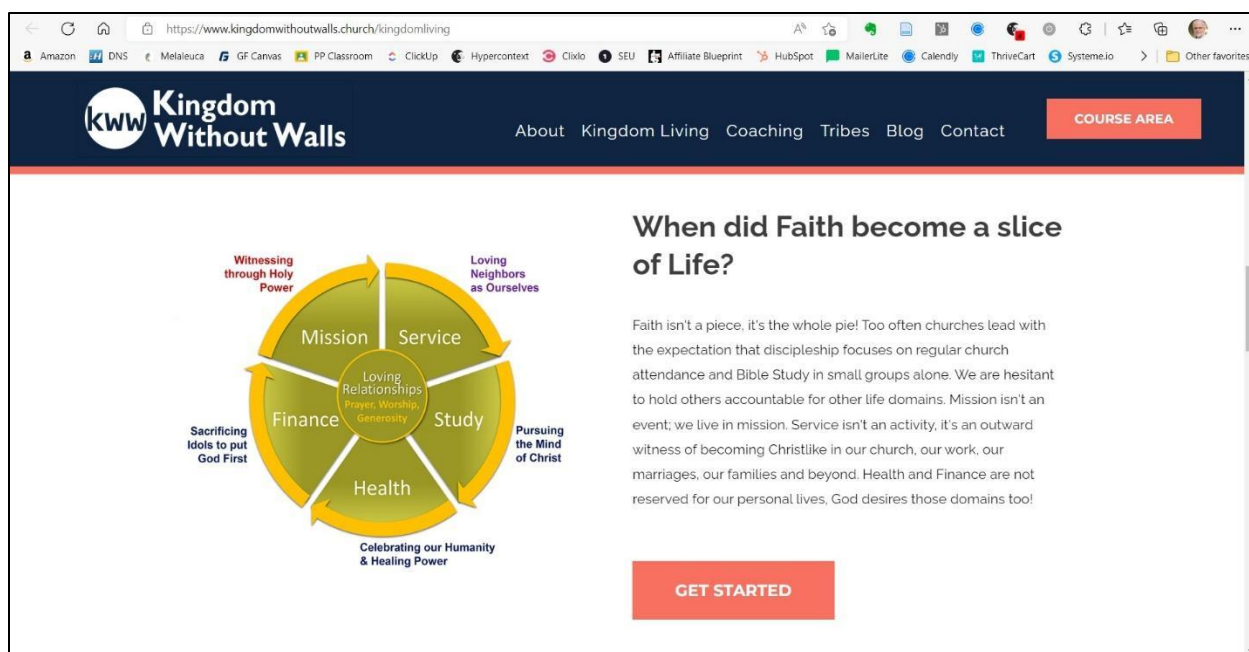
HOMEPAGE: SAMPLE 1



HOMEPAGE: SAMPLE 2



KINGDOM LIVING WORKSHOP PAGE: SAMPLE 1



KINGDOM LIVING WORKSHOP PAGE: SAMPLE 2

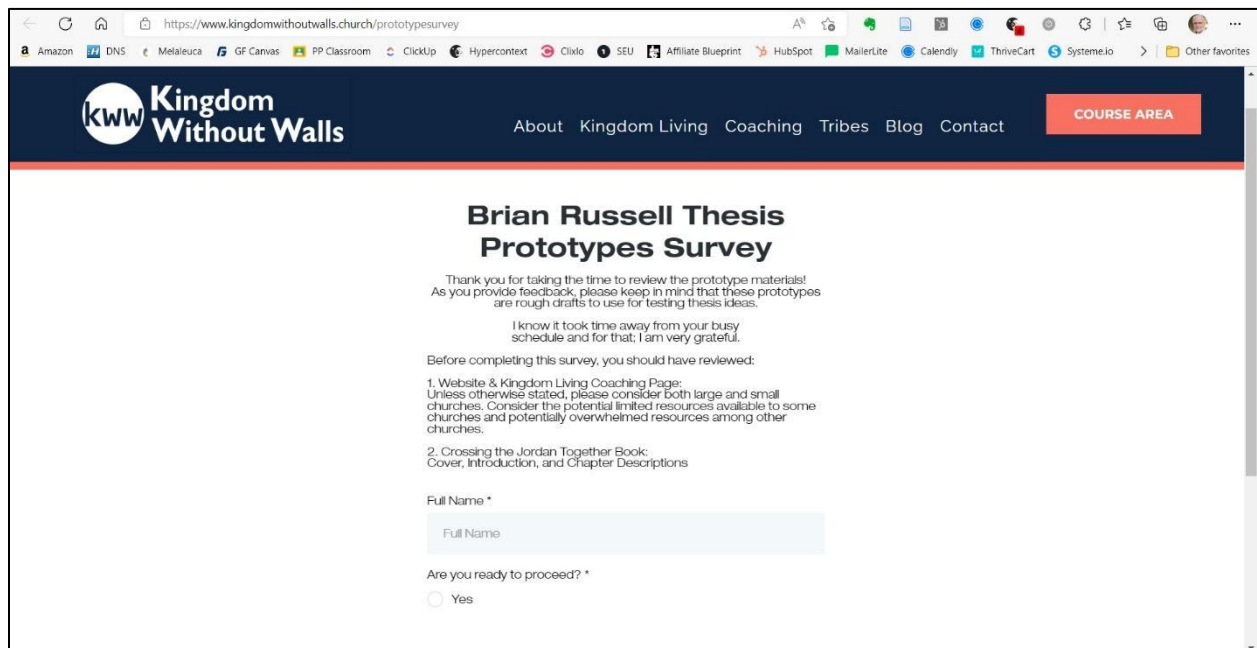


KINGDOM LIVING WORKSHOP PAGE: SAMPLE 3

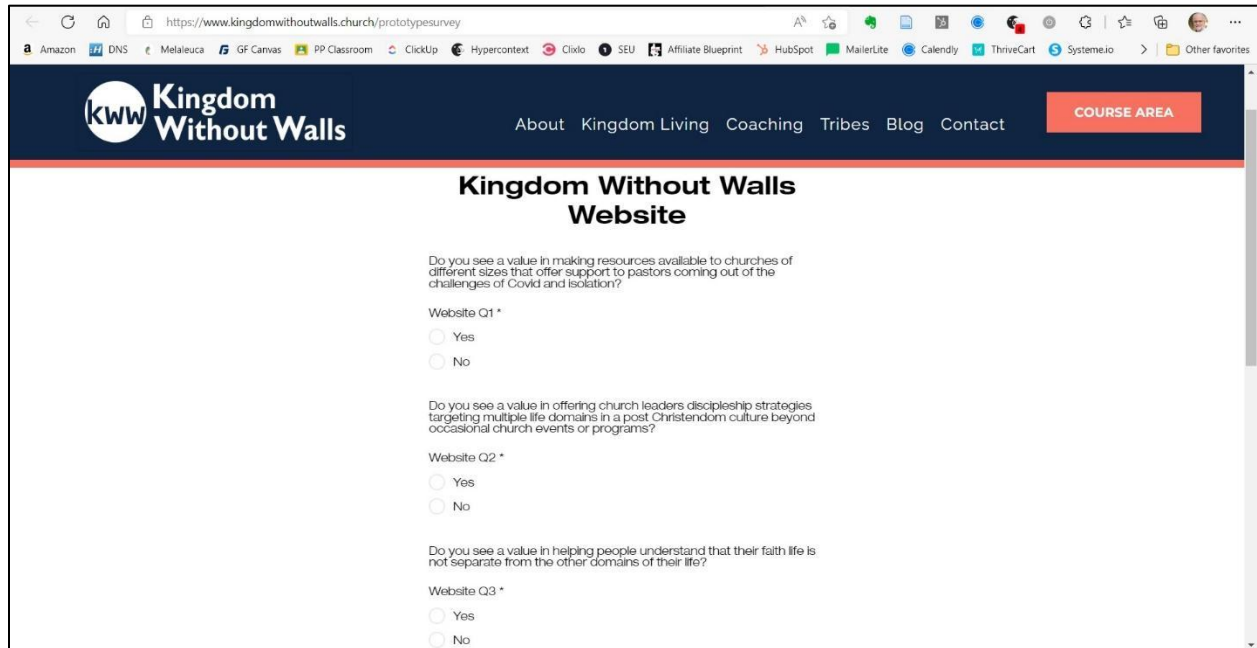
SURVEY SAMPLES

Survey Link: <https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church/prototypesurvey>

Screenshots:



PROTOTYPE SURVEY PAGE: SAMPLE 1



https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church/prototypesurvey

Amazon DNS Melaleuca GF Canvas PP Classroom ClickUp Hypercontext Clixio SEU Affiliate Blueprint HubSpot MailerLite Calendly ThriveCart Systemeio Other favorites

Kingdom Without Walls

About Kingdom Living Coaching Tribes Blog Contact **COURSE AREA**

Kingdom Without Walls Website

Do you see a value in making resources available to churches of different sizes that offer support to pastors coming out of the challenges of Covid and isolation?

Website Q1 *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you see a value in offering church leaders discipleship strategies targeting multiple life domains in a post Christendom culture beyond occasional church events or programs?

Website Q2 *

☐ Yes

☐ No

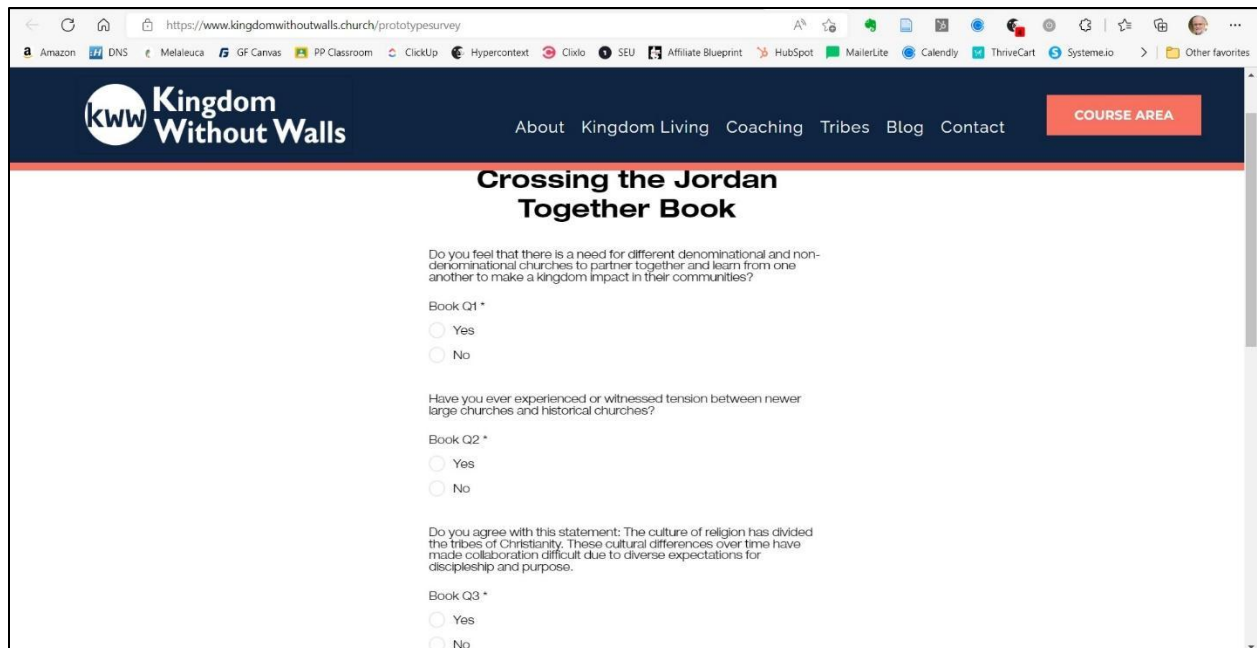
Do you see a value in helping people understand that their faith life is not separate from the other domains of their life?

Website Q3 *

☐ Yes

☐ No

PROTOTYPE SURVEY PAGE: SAMPLE 2



https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church/prototypesurvey

Amazon DNS Melaleuca GF Canvas PP Classroom ClickUp Hypercontext Clixio SEU Affiliate Blueprint HubSpot MailerLite Calendly ThriveCart Systemeio Other favorites

Kingdom Without Walls

About Kingdom Living Coaching Tribes Blog Contact **COURSE AREA**

Crossing the Jordan Together Book

Do you feel that there is a need for different denominational and non-denominational churches to partner together and learn from one another to make a kingdom impact in their communities?

Book Q1 *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Have you ever experienced or witnessed tension between newer large churches and historical churches?

Book Q2 *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you agree with this statement: The culture of religion has divided the tribes of Christianity. These cultural differences over time have made collaboration difficult due to diverse expectations for discipleship and purpose.

Book Q3 *

☐ Yes

☐ No

PROTOTYPE SURVEY PAGE: SAMPLE 3

https://www.kingdomwithoutwalls.church/prototypesurvey

Amazon DNS Metaleuca GF Canvas PP Classroom ClickUp Hypercontext Clivio SEU Affiliate Blueprint HubSpot MailerLite Calendly ThriveCart Systeme.io Other favorites

Kingdom Without Walls

About Kingdom Living Coaching Tribes Blog Contact **COURSE AREA**

Final Assessment

Any suggestions to make these prototypes stronger?

Optional Comments

Which prototype do you feel is the one that should be prioritized?

Top Choice: *

- ☐ Website
- ☐ Book
- ☐ Both Seem Equal
- ☐ Neither

75% **Submit**

PROTOTYPE SURVEY PAGE: SAMPLE 4

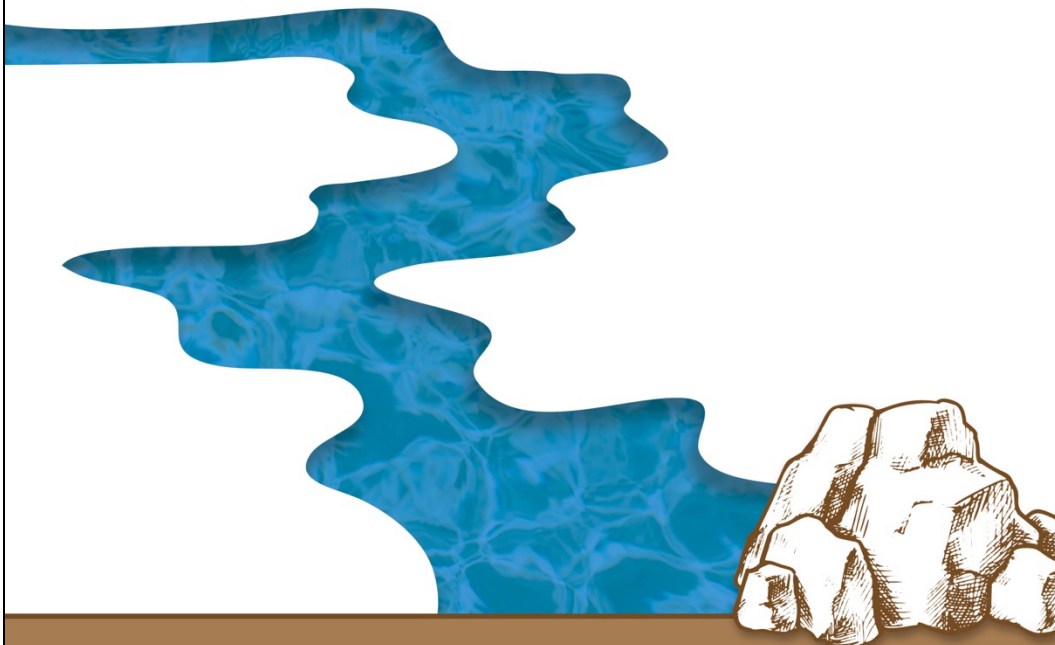
Note: Survey results were automatically compiled on the website backend database.

Appendix E—Project Appendix Documentation

Appendix 1: Crossing the Jordan Together

B R I A N D . R U S S E L L

Crossing *the* Jordan Together



Recoding the Language of Discipleship
Among the Tribes of Jesus Followers

CROSSING THE JORDAN TOGETHER

Brian D. Russell

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All rights reserved.

ISBN:

ISBN-13:

**This is dedicated to my wife and my daughter.
Their love and support made my story complete.**

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Prologue

Behind The Scenes The Story

Our lives are a series of events and experiences that lead us to a destination we rarely imagine before we arrive. That is certainly the case for me, as it is for most of us. In 2016, while serving as a lead pastor, God gave me a vision for discipleship. That vision was birthed out of a prophetic experience with the Holy Spirit several years earlier while serving on a planning team for a regional prayer event. However, it would take over a decade to discover the connection and where these events would lead.

What this book is Not:

- A leadership development book
- A step-by-step assimilation process

In other words, it's different from what we assume a book on discipleship is about. It's not a new skin on what we already know or believe.

This book is a recoding of discipleship that challenges our assumptions of what it means to be a disciple. Will there be familiar dialogue used throughout? Absolutely. However, I intend to challenge the implications of the expected. This is not a reframing of the past, it is a recoding for the future. As you walk through the chapters ahead, prepare yourself by getting comfortable with feeling uncomfortable. This is the real message

behind the familiar words, “Come, follow me.” Jesus, with those few words, told His disciples at that moment to leave their assumptions behind because we are going to familiar places to do unfamiliar things. “I’m not telling you where until we get there, so stay close behind.”

The goal of this book is not to help develop a leadership culture in the church. The proliferation of leadership programs in the church has escalated to a point where being a leader has become a sign of being a mature Christian. Instead, the goal is to create a servant culture that disciples Christians to become servant influencers who grow to become servant followers witnessing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

My journey as a follower of the way, including plenty of graduate studies, brought me to one humble realization. The more I learn, the less I know, and the less I need to prove. We serve an awesome God, who is bigger than the Bible, bigger than creation. Since I know that is true, we can no longer limit God to our own understanding. We must have confidence in our relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit to trust them and have faith that God’s plan is working, live into it.

The core principle of this book is that faith is not one slice of the pie called our life. It is not something we work on while we deal with the other pieces, such as family, health, work, and play. Many well-known discipleship programs illustrate the pie of Christian life in this way. We prefer it because we don’t want someone messing with those domains in our life - certainly not beyond a one-time class we should attend. The central proposition of this book is that faith is at the center of the pie, like a hub in a wheel. Every domain in our life is Jesus’ business to be witnessed by the church.

I have chosen to illustrate this recoding of discipleship

through my personal story, not because my story is the big story, but because it is part of God's story; it's all God's story. Therefore, I am sharing a slice of God's story to illustrate the lessons I have learned as a character in the plot. As an undergraduate professor, I tell my students every semester, "The only qualification for me to be standing here in front of you today is that I have made more mistakes than you have."

The stones on the book cover represent our hesitancy to fully rely on God's provision standing on one side of the river and the watershed moment of unity when crossing the Jordan together. The Introduction chapter provides the background behind the vision for the book. It contains an essential overview of this book's proposition.

The first five chapters are organized by one season of my life. On the beginning page of each chapter is the theme illustrated by the title and scripture. Additionally, a Kingdom Value and Discipleship Domain is identified. The first half of each chapter is my life story for a season. Following the story is the understanding and research behind the Kingdom Value and Discipleship Domain illustrated during that period. At the end of each chapter are questions a team can use to work through the journey of reframing discipleship together.

The sixth chapter summarizes the compilation of the first five chapters. It is an overview of what I call Kingdom Living.

The final chapter is a clarion call to move together as the church. As did the tribes of Israel who found themselves together embarking on a pivot at the river Jordan before them, so too are the tribes of the Church today. This final chapter addresses the question, "Okay, now I know why we're here. Where do we go next?"

Introduction

THE UNPREDICTABLE JOURNEY

The Church Reborn.

In 2020, the sound of church doors shutting echoed around the world. For a moment, all the tribes sat at the same table, drinking from the cup of humility. Every church, big and small, suddenly shared everything in common through the silence of our sanctuaries and auditoriums. The ushers and the hospitality teams were nowhere to be seen. The attendance gap between the mega-church and the small church was reduced to zero. A global pandemic became the great equalizer, bringing the church to its knees. But that is precisely where we needed to be.

What was expected to last weeks turned into unprecedented months. Like the twelve tribes of Israel arriving at the river Jordan together, the church was now about to cross over into a future unseen. No one was an expert on what was to come for the church. Yet, when the doors opened, the church was born again, now positioned to work together humbly to live in an Acts 2:46-47 community. Large tribes and small, who gather as faithful followers of the way in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, living expectantly to introduce thousands in their region daily to Christ! Our mission? Expect God.

This book took a lifetime to prepare. As it is for many, I was

unaware that my story continues to be woven into God's book of illustrations for the church. For the past twenty years, my passion for churches to work together and learn from one another has positioned me to observe many obstacles. I have witnessed near violence in the church between leaders and experienced the personal pain of disappointment and isolation from those I was called to trust and submit to under authority as a pastor. But my resolve to believe that the church is the hope of the world has never wavered. I believe that God equipped the church to build one another up and, in doing so, share life-giving ideas and fellowship. However, the years of wandering have divided both the people of the church and the leaders of their tribes. Ironically, what appeared to be the darkest year for the twenty-first-century church may have opened the door of opportunity, with Christ waiting on the other side.

This work is built upon the following foundations: First, God's plan for the church in the West remains unrealized as long as the body of Christ holds on to envy, hurt, competition, doubt, fear of loss, confusion, pride, self-interest, and the need for control.

Second, church cultural differences in the last century has divided the tribes of Jesus followers. These cultural differences, over time, have made collaboration difficult due to diverse expectations for discipleship and purpose. These differences are rooted in the church's DNA, established by its organizational structure and the launch plan when it opened its doors.

Third, churches closing their doors during the 2020 pandemic created an opportunity to unite church leaders by working together semiotically to reframe old assumptions about discipleship and the church's role. Since we arrived at this place at the exact moment in time, no one carries the baton as the

expert. Therefore, everyone moves ahead humbled by a new post-pandemic reality of church engagement and equal in their dependency on the Holy Spirit to show the way forward.

For the ancient Israelites, what could have taken eleven days turned into forty years. Much like that of the church today, they were overwhelmed by complaining, doubt, significant loss, and extreme sacrifice. This book's title, *Crossing the Jordan Together*, is a metaphor for the church and its tribes who arrived unexpectedly at a historical moment. Helpless to know what to do, the Israelites were in need of the tribe of Issachar, as told in 1 Chronicles 12:32, "From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take." Like the church today, the tribes of Israel couldn't cross over into this new beginning without God taking the first step: "The priests will carry the Ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall." (Joshua 3:13)

Now, as it was with the tribes of Israel, the church is called to embark together beyond the marker of this shared experience. Unified by our humility, we must move ever forward into the uncharted territory of our post-pandemic world. What we discover together will forever be our altar of witness. "We will use these stones to build a memorial. In the future, your children will ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' Then you can tell them, 'They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the Lord's Covenant went across.' These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever." (Joshua 4:6-7)

Like the people of Israel, I, too, wandered for forty years,

running from something and drawn to something until I heard the voice of God nudge me in a completely unexpected direction. Over twenty years ago, that nudge unfolded into a story filled with surprises and unexpected turns. While on a short sabbatical, a respected mentor and seminary professor implored me to tell my story because people needed to hear what God has done in my life. I had no idea why until I realized it reflected what God had revealed to me years earlier. God had written into my life a message that was planned for a time such as this.

Please see this work not as my story but God's story written through me to bring pastors and church leaders together to challenge our assumptions on the role of the church. As a teenager, I would not have imagined, nor would those around me, that my life would take me on a journey to where I stand now, from the life of a photographer, make-up artist, videographer, package designer, and marketer, to a pastor finding his way.

Life has certainly been unquestionably unexpected. This story is God's story, as seen through the lens of my story. It's a story of preparation for discovering the gift of seer and follower on an uncharted course towards a destination I'm led to by Jesus, yet unseen. I have been a risk taker my whole life, often with less-than-desirable results, but not without discovery and gratitude for the lessons along the way.

Our lives are constantly moving forward changing along the way. Often we hold on to the familiar hoping to avoid change, but change does not mean we are making old things new. Old things are not necessarily bad unless the results of doing them are not moving us forward. If so, we remain stuck, leaving the call to follow Jesus unanswered. We could be simply putting a fresh coat of paint on irrelevancy. Two millennia ago, Jesus of

Nazareth spoke the words, "Follow me." From that moment, He never stopped moving forward. Today, the gap between humanity's way of life and the ever-living Christ, as understood through the Gospels, has eclipsed our ability to clearly see His work among us. We can no longer rely on tradition, experience, or reason to catch up. Today, we must learn to be seers in the Spirit. Some will be called to be risk takers and pilgrims with the gift to see the signs of where Jesus has been and is still going and to know what to do with these signs. It's time for the body of Christ to catch up and adjust the prescription of our lenses. To boldly cut the vines that enslave us to the expectations of our comfort. We are pilgrims called to discover the path Jesus left behind, though it is now overgrown with complacency, assumption, and pride.

For the past twenty years, I have led with a passion for ecumenical cooperation between churches driven by the yearning to see churches working together to serve the communities to which we were called. During that time, I experienced, like many, churchgoers moving from one church to another, looking for the elusive perfect church. As a result, new worship styles emerged, creating gaps between the historical and planted churches in the past twenty years. Also, like many, my response to these new styles of worship was judgmental, assuming that church done well did not need the way of the world leading worship. After all, it's easy to attract people when you entertain them. I was sure my frustration with change was rooted in a love for the church. However, I would come to realize my assumptions were incorrect. This was not a matter of rightness and doctrine but a battle within me between envy and pride. Eventually, there would be a time when I developed a relationship with large churches seeking to know what they have

learned along the way. During that time, leaders of my denomination attempted to stop the bleeding and gathered leaders to teach us what to do. Initially, I was excited to hear what the experienced leaders had to say and to discover what I could do to help our church move forward.

Then it happened. I realized we weren't moving forward. We were implementing changes, but those changes were not getting meaningful results toward life-changing incarnate ministry. Instead, they simply made us more efficient at doing the same things differently. It wasn't long before I questioned the value of trying to break out of a box from within the confines of our own experience. So, I ventured out to attend church leadership conferences outside of our denomination. As I encouraged other pastors to do the same, I discovered that the distrust between the historical church traditions and the independent church plants ran deep. But why was this happening? Why would those of us who led local churches dating back decades, even a century, struggle so much with learning from newer churches that seemed to be thriving and growing?

I have heard countless times, "We are not that kind of church. We don't want to focus on getting big." Hearing this repeatedly, I made broad assumptions about the reasons behind this seemingly judgmental attitude. If only they knew the leaders. Indeed, they would understand that numbers really don't motivate them. They certainly love Jesus, too! Yes, they are preaching the Bible. Yes, the Holy Spirit is lifted up. Naturally, there are those with questionable motives, but where does that not exist?

This book is the result of a quest to discover ways to break down barriers that inhibit ecumenical cooperation and discovery. We all bring something important to the table and need to be

heard. Big and small, everyone has a vital role to play in understanding what it means to be an incarnate witness of Jesus Christ, who doesn't just change lives but changes our DNA.

The development of this book began in 2020 by leading research workshops that included pastors and lay leaders of both large and small churches—churches with 150 years of serving and churches less than ten years of gathering people together to hear the Gospel. The resulting research over two years made it apparent that, indeed, barriers existed between historical and more recent church plants. These barriers are primarily due to the cultural differences in church organizational structure and discipleship expectations.

Rather than taking the common fix-it approach to change church culture, I was determined instead to take an approach of reengineering our assumptions of what it means to make a disciple as instructed to do by Jesus seen in Matthew 28:19. Asking new questions around discipleship and abandoning existing church paradigms it opens the door to avoid a defensive posture by those who might take offense.

Doing this together allows us to take a genesis approach that requires new thinking and imagining. Together, we can take an inductive look at what Jesus implied when he used the word disciple. Why do we focus on Bible study when there was no Bible? Together, we will look at the work of historians and compare twenty-first-century tradition against first-century followers of the way. Why do we often look down upon large churches when Acts 2:46-47 indicates that soon after Pentecost, they met together in the Temple with gatherings in the thousands?

Together, we will look at research in the church today, which looks at what it means to thrive in life and the church's role in

modeling kingdom living for followers of the way. Why do we avoid life domains outside the church when doing life together was what the disciples who said yes to Jesus did? Through the lens of my life exposed, this book offers lessons and illustrations to begin the conversation. Please accept this invitation to sit at the table, break bread, and discover what the Holy Spirit reveals through Jesus Christ as we cross the Jordan together.

Chapter 1

NEW BEGINNINGS

Seeking normal.

"This means that anyone who belongs to
Christ has become a new person.
The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"
2 Corinthians 5:17

Kingdom Value: Identity **Discipleship Domain: Health**

Growing up with a birth defect. Feeling different and seeking what it means to be normal. Accepting Jesus Christ in my life. Developing an interest in health. These experiences would shape my identity. It would take a lifetime to begin to understand my identity in Jesus is in we, not me.

This chapter focuses on the Kingdom Value of what it means to understand our identity in Jesus Christ and how our identity in Christ can free us from our limitations where our weakness is turned into our greatest strengths. Additionally, it focuses on the Discipleship Domain of Health. Why is it that the church tends to limit the conversation of physical health to prayer for healing and not support one another in healthy living? Jesus did His most significant work around a table. Shouldn't it look like He prepared it for our well-being?

SAMPLE SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How have your past experiences shaped your self-image?
2. Has health ever caused a limiting belief about your self-image?
3. In what ways can you see how your Christian identity has become church identity?
4. What steps can you take now to better understand your new identity in Jesus Christ?

Working Resources

The Works of John Wesley Volume 32: Medical and Health Writings -
Dr James Donat, and Randy L. Maddox, eds.

Not a Fan: Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus -
Kyle Idleman

We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology -
James H. Evans, Jr

24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life - Matthew Sleeth, and
Eugene H. Peterson.

Food and God: A Theological Approach to Eating, Diet, and Weight Control -
Joel R. Soza

The Jesus Prescription for a Healthy Life - Leonard Sweet

Health and Medicine in the Evangelical Tradition: "Not by Might Nor Power" -
Leonard Sweet

The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life - Rick Warren, Dr Daniel Amen,
and Dr Mark Hyman.

Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating - Norman Wirzba

Chapter 2

EXPOSED

Manual Override.

"Bring all who claim me as their God,
for I have made them for my glory.
It was I who created them."

Isaiah 43:7

Kingdom Value: Purpose Discipleship Domain: Study

Baptized but without a clear direction. Photography exposed me to a life without a rabbi and a sense of purpose that was out of focus. I would wander without direction, studying to become a photographer, a make-up artist, and finally, an A/V producer trying to control my circumstances manually.

This chapter focuses on the Kingdom Value of what it means to understand our purpose and how it directs our life. Additionally, it focuses on the Discipleship Domain of Study. Does study only include the Bible, or should it also have a randomization of learning about culture in a time such as this? This chapter embraces what it means to pursue the mind of Christ and an understanding of God's word in relationship with the world filled with the people made in God's image.

SAMPLE SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel your life has purpose?
2. How do you understand your purpose in relation to the church?
3. Do you struggle with studying God's word daily?
4. What steps can you take now to discover God's purpose for you?

Working Resources

Grasping God's Word, Fourth Edition: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible - J. Scott Duvall, J. Daniel Hays, and Mark L. Strauss and Kevin J. Vanhoozer

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Fourth Edition - Gordon D. Fee, and Douglas Stuart

Faith Driven Entrepreneur: What It Takes to Step Into Your Purpose and Pursue Your God-Given Call to Create - Henry Kaestner, J. D. Greear, Chip Ingram, and Lecrae

Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blindness to Better Understand the Bible - E. Randolph Richards, and Brandon J. O'Brien

The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For? - Rick Warren

The Band Meeting: Rediscovering Relational Discipleship in Transformational Community - Kevin M. Watson, and Scott T. Kisker

The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God - Dallas Willard

The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives - Dallas Willard

Chapter 3

NON-LINEAR

Reengineering the process.

"Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being."

Philippians 2:7

Kingdom Value: Humility

Discipleship Domain: Finance

Suddenly the seasons changed with exposure to corporate life. Continuing in communications, I found myself now telling stories in videos and product packaging. During this season, I learned to think in a non-linear way.

This chapter focuses on the Kingdom Value of what it means to understand humility. Too often, we attach shame to our past and confuse humility with humiliation. Additionally, it focuses on the Discipleship Domain of Finance. Is God only concerned with 10% of our finances? Should money management be limited to a course checked off a list? How does one's relationship with money daily impact their relationship with others? Is anxiety caused by misplaced security in money? Do Jesus followers trust Him enough to include letting God take over their finances? This chapter discusses what it means to

sacrifice our idols to put God first and to understand the distinction between our relationship with money outside of work.

Sample Small Group Questions

1. What areas in your life cause you to feel the most anxiety?
2. What areas in your personal life and work do you find yourself needing to control?
3. Have you ever experienced your relationship with finances causing you to feel pride or shame?
4. What steps can you take now to better understand Christian humility as sign of contentment?

Working Resources

The Generosity Factor: Discover the Joy of Giving Your Time, Talent, and Treasure - Ken Blanchard

Trusting God - Jerry Bridges

Halftime: Moving from Success to Significance - Bob Buford, and Jim Collins

Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership - John Dickson

Winning the War on Worry: Cultivate a Peaceful Heart and a Confident Mind - Louie Giglio

Success by Design: Ten Biblical Secrets to Help You Achieve Your God-Given Potential - Peter Hirsch

Humility: True Greatness - C. J. Mahaney, and Mark Dever

Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life - Henri J. M. Nouwen

Chapter 4

OUTSIDE THE WALLS

Hearing the call.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:8

Kingdom Value: Listening
Discipleship Domain: Mission

I find myself now on the streets—not literally, but as a business owner supporting other business owners to be communicators. Surprisingly, God walked me through understanding the ministry of work. Marketplace Ministry would be my new home for a season.

This chapter focuses on the Kingdom Value of what it means to understand listening. To truly listen means being vulnerable to being changed by what you hear. Additionally, it focuses on the Discipleship Domain of Mission. Is mission in ministry limited to jobs at the church? If God calls everyone to be in ministry, is being a pastor or church leader held in higher regard than working in the secular world? How well does the church help others understand their work as ministry in the same

way they are encouraged to participate on mission trips? Mission, for Christ's followers, is not a state of doing; it's a state of being.

The Story.

Coming out of this difficult transition into a new season of my life would not be the last challenge for my family and me. For the past ten years, my life has been dedicated to corporate culture, surrounded by people and a path set by the vision of upper management. A workaholic is now feeling the isolation of a familiar past. A people pleaser who spent a decade serving others is now feeling lost without purpose once again. The one personal trait that would carry me forward would be my tolerance for risk-taking. However, this is not a particular trait that my wife feels comfortable with, so it would be challenging for her. To this day, I am grateful for her patience with me and her willingness to trust my decision for the season ahead. What we did not know at the time would be the extreme peaks and valleys lying ahead that would change the trajectory of our lives together.

Soon, I sensed the opportunity to lean on my past experiences and start my own business. I began my career working for myself, so it felt natural to do it again. This time it wouldn't be photography, but my path would now lead me to pursue using my new skills learned over the past decade. I combined my creative past with my recent corporate education in marketing. Incidentally, my first customers were former coworkers at Tropicana. As with all businesses, the startup was slow. I turned a guest bedroom into an office and focused on the first big job of designing displays for Tropicana Products that

would be used in Walmart locations across the country.

Operating primarily on the generous severance cushion from my former employer, I didn't feel pressure to grow the business quickly. However, the time would come when that pressure would find its way into our home. To make some extra money, I worked for one of my best friends from college. He owned a large photography studio, and I helped him start what would be the beginning of a digital graphics department. I won't begin to explain the difference between what that meant in the late 1990s and today, but everything was moving along smoothly.

Then one day, a call came. My wife's boss was on the line, which was highly unusual. He had a very concerned tone in his voice. When I asked how he was doing, he told me he had some bad news to share. My wife had received a call from her brother informing her their mom had passed away unexpectedly. He asked that I come immediately because my wife was upset. When I arrived, my wife was sitting in her boss's office by herself, trying as best she could to grasp how her best friend was suddenly gone. As significant as that call was, we had no idea the impact it would have on our lives.

A few weeks passed, and Mother's Day was approaching. My wife said we should think about going to church that Sunday. Her mom was devoted to her church, and she thought it was a way we could honor her memory. I agreed, so we found a church that was part of the denomination I grew up in with an ideal start time: not too early and not too late. Perfect. We would have the rest of the day open. When we arrived, we were surprised to see that there was a praise band, which we had never experienced before. Also to our surprise, one of the praise team members was

someone I had worked closely with for years at Tropicana. We immediately felt at home.

Quickly, my wife and I got involved. We both joined the praise band right away. I was soon asked to mentor young teenage boys in a discipleship program called confirmation. It was a journey through the Bible and discussing what it meant to know Jesus. One of the program's strengths was the relationship between the students and their mentors. A one on one mentoring relationship that I would come to appreciate. Soon, I was asked to lead outreach and evangelism. All this was coming quickly for someone who hadn't been to church in two decades. I later realized that these events would lead to a most unexpected pivot in my life. All I saw when in the midst of it was how, as I poured my time into the church, my business wasn't growing as I had hoped. I had one employee in addition to myself. Times were tough, and the company was having trouble making expenses.

Then one day, the call came. It was a former contractor who worked for me at Tropicana. She had a customer who needed design work for a new service they were about to launch. But they also wanted help marketing the service, which wasn't their strength. So she asked if I could come in as a subcontractor and help her with that part of the project. Of course, I was glad to have the opportunity and happily agreed.

As the project progressed, the owner of the company said that we had reached a point where he needed to bring in the CFO of the company to get input. The day came for our meeting, and when the CFO arrived, I was shocked to discover it was the former CFO of the company I worked for just before I was hired at Tropicana. What were the odds? It had been twelve years since we had laid eyes on one another. We would soon discover

that God had dramatically changed both our lives over time, and our reunion was indeed not a coincidence. God had a plan!

Once the project's design phase was complete, I continued to work for the company as their marketing agency. That is when the unexpected happened. One day while in a meeting with the owner and the CFO, they asked me if I had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That question certainly caught me off guard. After ten years in a corporate workplace, I had yet to experience questions about my faith before in a business environment until now.

My response was, "Of course. I am a leader in my church, and I serve at the church in many different capacities." While they were not completely satisfied with that answer, we moved on with our meeting. However, they did not stop there. At our next meeting, the same question. Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? My answer was, "Don't worry. I'm good." This went on for several months. The owner was slightly laid back in his approach, while the CFO was direct. However, they never gave up, and neither did I in my response.

Even after months of this exchange, I didn't realize something was happening within me until, one day, there was another call of sorts. I was in the bathroom getting ready for work when I was convicted that I should surrender to God and His word completely. I felt I was holding back and had not allowed God's word to have full authority over my life. I decided I needed to pray the sinner's prayer I had publicly prayed when I was thirteen years old and recommit my life to Jesus Christ. So, I got on my knees at the foot of the bed, prayed that prayer, and once again surrendered my life to Jesus as Lord.

When I stood up, I was expecting something to happen.

Nothing. I then went about getting ready for work and left it at that. The next day, I was in the bathroom getting ready for work, and the same conviction overcame me. So, I got on my knees at the foot of the bed and prayed the same prayer. Nothing. I went about getting ready for work and left it at that.

On the third day, I was in the bathroom getting ready for work, and it happened—the same conviction from the Holy Spirit. So, I got on my knees at the foot of the bed and prayed the same prayer I had prayed over the past two days. Still nothing. Like before, I went about my business, got ready for work, and headed to the office. However, the drive that day would change my life. On this third day, God did something remarkable.

After three days of praying that prayer, God revealed himself to me miraculously. As I turned the corner on my commute, I looked up at the sky and saw the face of Jesus. Sounds corny, I know, but Jesus can speak to us however He chooses. At that moment, I received the gift of faith. It was so overwhelming that God had removed all doubt, and I started yelling, “He’s real. He’s real,” as I tried to keep my car from running off the side of the road. It wasn’t until I surrendered to God that I no longer needed answers, and only then did God give me all the answers I would ever need.

I had such an overpowering encounter with the Holy Spirit that I have never looked back. My work with my clients changed. I began to understand my role of serving them from a ministry perspective. I found myself relating to my business in a different light. I was beginning to think about how my faith played a roll. I started to understand this event's significance in my life and what a gift I received in this divine encounter. Surprisingly, I was hesitant to share what had happened. Perhaps

it was so unusual that I thought no one would believe me. It was several days before I slowly shared the experience, as it took time to allow what God did through the Son and Holy Spirit to sink in.

I do not believe that this was a “born again” moment, although I thought that for some time. However, I believe this was a revival in my life and relationship with Jesus Christ. It was a keen awareness of the Holy Spirit that dwells within those who, through their baptism, have a heightened awareness of the power that resides within. I don’t believe I had fallen from grace before that encounter. The Holy Spirit didn’t need a do-over. What God seals once is enough! This was, however, a moment when I fully surrendered my life to Jesus Christ, including all the baggage I picked up since I was thirteen along the way since I was thirteen. I began a season of looking ahead to where he was leading me instead of always looking back over my shoulder at where I had been. This was my answer to that question from my clients, “Do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ?” For the first time, I understood my response, “Absolutely, and it began when I accepted Jesus and was baptized at thirteen. It’s been a journey, Jesus was persistent by my side, and now it’s about to get exciting!”

Indeed, my business changed moving forward from this encounter. God started sending new clients who were Christian business owners and understood that God owned their companies; they were simply stewards of the gift God entrusted to them. I began to understand the term Marketplace Ministry. The church at work in and through the marketplace. In addition to traditional marketing, we supported clients in producing the materials to help them share Jesus with their customers. It was a

new way of thinking for me, and I began to see my business more as a ministry than a marketing company I owned and controlled. I realized for the first time that I was never really in control of anything. I needed a better driver.

As I began to work for more Christian business owners, I recognized a common thread between them. They were focused, self-made, confident leaders, and telling them what they needed to do for their companies took work. After all, they were already successful, or they wouldn't have the resources to hire our company. However, I was able to lean on an important lesson I learned as a corporate contractor serving executives ten years earlier. Learn to listen carefully and observe with a posture of receiving. Don't assume anything; lean in with the customer's best interest in mind. What I discovered is that most strong business leaders know what they want. However, that often doesn't translate into what they need. A small business hires a marketing company because it has grown to the point where the company has exceeded the leader's skill sets. In turn, my sole job was to listen with the willingness to be changed by what I hear and blend my experience with the company's needs. That's it. My job isn't to tell the customer how to get what they want. My job is to tell the customer what they need. My most loyal partners were the leaders who allowed me to serve them that way.

Then one day, the call came. It was the CFO God was about to use once again to turn my life upside down. He told me that there was someone whom he wanted me to meet and asked that I come to his office to talk. When I arrived, I met a former pastor who shared that God sent him to Manatee County from Colorado. He didn't know why, but he and his wife wanted to be

obedient, so they moved, trusting the Lord with the details. He went on to share that he got a word from God. He was called to lead a prayer movement that began in South Africa a few years earlier called The Global Day of Prayer. The event took place every year on Pentecost Sunday around the globe. The CFO asked if I would serve on the team because of my media background. I said yes, not knowing where it would eventually lead. I would later learn that this person God put into my life was a former VP of Promise Keepers, a national men's movement that drew tens of thousands to stadiums across the country, and currently the president of The Center for Revival and Awakening. He became one of my closest mentors and still is today.

So, we planned the first event with a small band of people that God brought together: pastors, intercessory prayer warriors, a Christian radio station manager, and businesspeople. We didn't know how many would attend, but we felt God leading us to hold the event at our local civic center. It was a stretch to make that big of a commitment, but we put our trust in God to fill the space.

The event wouldn't involve any speakers. The whole three-hour event would be worship and prayers led by dozens of pastors and lay people. At the time, intercessory prayer was not even on my radar as a ministry God would call me to be involved in. I remember our first planning meeting. I felt so self-conscious. It was my first experience calling out to God passionately and urgently for His intervention. I was entirely out of my comfort zone, and here I was, a marketing company owner, sitting in a corporate conference room, praying for God to intercede in our planning. The imposter syndrome feeling I

had was right where God wanted me.

It wasn't long before God began a series of interruptions. First, there was a Christian stewardship class taught at our church, so I decided to go. The course took place over a couple of days. The instructor was excellent. I was captivated by the biblical financial principles he shared.

When I got home after the last day of class, I decided to go through the budget worksheet. It was apparent that there was no way we could tithe with our mortgage. Over the following week, I was convicted by the Holy Spirit to make the changes necessary to return 10 percent of our income to God. My awareness of hearing the nudging of God was new to me as my relationship with the Holy Spirit began to grow. I talked to my wife about what I was hearing from God concerning tithing, so we decided to sell the house we were living in and downsize. This decision took trusting God with our security to a new level.

We sold our house several months later and found a smaller place that would allow us room in our finances to begin to meet our giving goal. But there was a catch. After several visits to a new community and on the verge of signing a contract, we discovered that it was a 55+ community. At the time, we were under that age by nearly two decades. We were told it didn't matter because they had to allow a certain percentage of owners under that age. However, one other rule in the community would require a great deal of consideration. In addition to being a 55+ community, there were no kids allowed. At the time, we did not have kids, and it was not something we had discussed up to that point, even though we had been married for ten years. While age was not the barrier, for the first time, we needed to think about whether children were to be part of our future. I was forty, and

my wife was thirty-eight, so it wouldn't be long before having kids was no longer an option. We both agreed that we needed to go to the Lord and seek an answer for our lives together.

After much prayer, we both came together with the same discernment from the Lord. God had other plans for us as a couple than parenthood. My leadership in the church was expanding, and we felt God was telling us that there was a different path ahead that didn't include children. So, we agreed that kids were not part of God's plan for us, and we should go ahead and take steps to purchase a house in this community. So, that's what we did.

Then one day, the call came. We both heard the same voice. Three months after moving into the house we loved, we stood in the kitchen one afternoon and almost simultaneously said to one another, "I think we are supposed to have kids." God had answered our prayers with a voice through the Holy Spirit; it just didn't happen on our schedule.

Six months later, my wife shared the good news with me. We were pregnant! Our lives were about to be turned upside down again. Only half a year earlier, this wasn't even on our radar. We were sure God had other plans for us that wouldn't allow time for kids. I guess we were wrong. We started doing all the usual things like regular doctor visits, and discussing how our lives would change. It was an exciting time for us both. Three months passed, and it was time for a scheduled ultrasound. We were nervous when the nurse technician came in to do the procedure. We both were staring at the screen as she did the scan. Of course, we had no idea what we were looking at, but she patiently explained everything as she moved along. As I am sure she did for everyone. After several minutes of doing the scan, the

nurse stopped and told us she was done. She then excused herself and said she would be right back. For those reading this who have gone through this, you probably know the feeling at that moment and remember the change of atmosphere in the room. When the nurse returned, she brought in the doctor on call, who explained that our child had passed. I know how I felt then, but I don't even pretend to know what my wife felt. There are no words.

By this time, others knew that we were pregnant, so we began the difficult process of telling our family and friends what had happened. After everything we went through to get to this point, was this part of God's plan? Everyone rallied around us, especially our church family. We were trying to be brave, but as soon as our pastor found out, he knew we needed to talk this through. You did not move past this without dealing with the emotional toll this takes on you. Most surprising was the number of women we knew very well who approached my wife and told her they had gone through the same thing. That was a turning point for us in understanding how important it is to have a church family. We are not meant to live in isolation and go through things alone. This experience is a reminder of the miracle of childbirth and how perfectly things must come together in a woman's body to be ready to conceive, carry, and deliver a little human. It is a witness to a creator who never stops creating.

The healing process is complicated, as there are so many things a woman must go through after this happens. It's hard to properly grieve and move on during weeks of doctor visits, procedures, and self-doubt that remind you of losing a child you hadn't met but already loved. We decided not to give up, and

after the time for healing, six months later, we were pregnant again. This time the story would have a different ending.

While at a routine checkup close to the delivery date, it was determined that my wife had begun to dilate. It was time. Even though this was nineteen years ago, I can still see my wife standing in the parking lot at the hospital, holding her pillow and looking a little nervous. Understandably so. My wife was in labor for twelve hours, and I was amazed she had that much strength. I stood by her side, holding her hand, encouraging her to keep pushing. I told her that she could do it while thinking to myself that there was no way she could do it! But, like countless mothers before her, she had the strength to deliver the miracle of a child. After our daughter was born, they whisked her to the table to clear her lungs.

While my poor wife finished birthing alone, I was now focused on other things. I was mesmerized watching the nurses care for our daughter when I heard a voice. It was the doctor saying over and over, "It's a miracle. It's a miracle." I turned around to see the doctor holding the umbilical cord. He was amazed to see that the cord was in a knot. He was in disbelief that the pregnancy did not have complications during the twelve hours of labor. When I saw the doctor later that morning, I asked him when the cord would have gotten into a knot. He told me it must have happened within the first three to four months of pregnancy. Beyond that time, the fetus becomes too large to spin around to allow that to happen. That was the breathtaking moment when my wife and I realized God was always in control of His plans for us. Our daughter was a miracle, and God made sure that we knew it! After our daughter was born, we decided it wouldn't be fair to remain living in a community designed to be

kid-free. So, we sold our new home during a market upswing and bought a larger house than we had before the decision to downsize—and with a smaller mortgage. With our decision to tithe, God made us parents with a larger home. In our obedience, God was faithful.

As the years went by, I served the customers of our marketing company, served others in my church, and served on the planning team for the National Day of Prayer event, and learned how to be a dad. Everything seemed just as God had planned. I understood serving through Marketplace Ministry and its call on my life. I was right where God wanted me. At least, that is what I thought. Then came the year 2008, a year that many small business owners will never forget. Everything that I thought I knew suddenly didn't make sense at all. Small poor business decisions over the years grew to become big problems. Things were about to change and what seemed to be the worst years was a step towards something completely unexpected.

Leading in my church, I regularly attended our denomination's Annual Conference. One year, while attending an ordination service, I heard a different call, only this time, I didn't answer. The ordination service was one of my favorite parts of the Annual Conference. There was something special about it. I could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit as those whom God called submitted their lives to serve the church through pastoral vocation.

Watching the ceremony, I was moved by the commitment of all who took the stage to be prayed over and commissioned by the bishop. Following the ordination service, there is a tradition that the presiding bishop ends the event with an altar call for those who hear the call into pastoral ministry. I will never forget

how I felt that year as I watched those called walking toward the stage. I had an overwhelming conviction of the Holy Spirit that I was supposed to go forward that night to the altar. It took everything that I could do to keep from getting up. What kept me from making that trip down the aisle that night was hearing from the Holy Spirit that this was not just about me. It had to be a call answered by the whole family. So, I stayed in my seat, knowing what God wanted me to do that night. This was not over, God told me. It was just the beginning.

At our next planning meeting for The Global Day of Prayer, I shared with the team where God was leading me. Their response surprised me. Instead of being happy for me, they were upset. How could I leave Marketplace Ministry, where God's people were genuinely doing Kingdom work? Frankly, I didn't have an answer, but I would later understand that is usually how God works.

After their shock wore off, they were reminded of the decision to move the prayer event to a location in nearby DeSoto County in three years. A hundred and fifty years earlier, this location was once the Manatee County seat, in the center of what now consists of eight counties. When it was discovered that the county was originally more extensive, we felt God telling the team that the original Manatee County was what God had in mind all along. We were thinking too small. God had planned something only God could do. Across the street from the historic landmark where the county seat once stood, is a church planted a century and a half ago. It just so happened that the church was the same denomination I was a part of, so the joke of the day was that I would become the pastor of that church forty miles away, sitting in a rural part of the state. As ridiculous as it was, it would

remain the inside joke of the team for the next three years.

Two years went by, and on the fifth year of holding the prayer event at the convention center, there were over 3,500 people gathered to cry out to God. Around the globe, the event grew to over half a billion people. Preparations were now being made to hold the event at a new location. The church across the street of the former courthouse founded in 1868 in the middle of orange groves and cattle pastures. A church that was then the center of the county God called us to. The pastor was delighted to participate and support us in any way he could. While researching its history, it was revealed that there were stories of a great revival that took place there. It was said that great balls of fire were seen in the sky as people came from everywhere to worship and praise God for what was taking place. Years later, I would get confirmation from a gentleman who told me his grandmother spoke of what had happened.

The plan was to have the phone company set up a special high-speed line to the internet. Instead of inviting only two counties to the civic center, we would broadcast the event to churches across the eight counties of what we were now calling the OMC or the Original Manatee County. Those leading prayer and worship would be at the church for the streaming event. This was years before streaming was an expectation. At that time, this was a significant undertaking by our small team. The internet connection was arranged as well as the usual radio promotions. Churches were also getting on board, and those with the technical capability agreed to be host churches in the surrounding counties. Everything was falling into place.

Then one day, the call came. We were two weeks away from Pentecost Sunday, and the event was all set. When I

answered the phone, I heard the pastor of the historic church on the other side. I assumed he was calling to get an update and tell me everything was ready on their end. However, unfortunately, that was far from the case. He told me we would have to cancel the event because he was leaving the church due to conflicts. I was speechless except to tell him how sorry I was and that we would pray for him and his wife. In shock, I called the other leaders to tell them what had happened. So many plans had been made and the radio advertising was already on air. How could we stop at this point? So, I did the only thing I could think of: call the church. When I called, I explained who I was and what I had just heard from their pastor. I asked if there was anything we could do to hold the event at their church still. She told me she was glad I called and would put me in touch with one of their lay leaders.

A meeting was arranged with me, the CFO, and the pastor who started it all to discuss our options. He was very gracious and told us that it would be no problem for us to hold the event as planned. He was familiar with the event because we asked him, as a representative from his church, to lead one of the prayers the previous year. The meeting went exceptionally well, and we ended it in prayer, thanking God for seeing this through with us. What could have become a scramble and perhaps an enormous letdown became a witness of the Holy Spirit working in all of this and the faithfulness of God. It was falling into place, and everything was back as we had expected. Or so it seemed.

Then, the following week, the call came. The district superintendent from our denomination called me. Since I was going through the candidacy process to become a pastor, I had several meetings with the superintendent in our area. However,

this call was more than unexpected. He asked me how I was doing, and without much delay, he told me that he wanted to appoint me as the lead pastor of a historic church about forty miles east of us. Yes, the church that just lost its pastor. Yes, the church that the team had been joking about for three years that I would one day pastor. Yes, the church where we were about to hold our prayer event. Yes, the most outrageous possibility that could be imagined, God had imagined long ago. When I hung up the phone, I was in shock. I fell to my knees, crying in disbelief, praising God. I hadn't even finished my candidacy and was appointed to a church that would be a central prayer hub for eight counties for years to come. God had done the unthinkable.

A few days later, we held the prayer event on Pentecost Sunday: three hours of prayer and worship filled with the Holy Spirit. For me, it was another reminder of how big and present our God is all the time. Four days after the event, it was official. I became the lead pastor of that historic church. God is good!

Hearing the Call.

If there is one thing Jesus does exceptionally well, it is interrupting our lives when we least expect it. But that comes as no surprise, as it is precisely how the story begins with those whom we now know as the first disciples in the Gospels. "Drop your nets and leave your business behind. Come, follow me. I can't tell you where we are going, but I will show you what it means to live as a disciple along the way." These, of course, are my words summarizing what we read in Matthew 4:18-22. The process was to hear, listen, trust, respond, and learn. What was not said was to meet me tomorrow so we can study and plan a time to serve. No, it was, "follow me, and everything we do from

this moment on will be the life of a disciple that I command you to teach others to do the same,” as instructed in Matthew 28:19-20. In his book, *I Am a Follower*, Leonard Sweet, speaker, prolific author, and professor of Portland Seminary’s doctoral program “Semiotics, Church, and Culture,” and who I am grateful to call a friend and mentor, writes, “Jesus called his disciples to ‘follow me,’ but he didn’t tell them where they were going.”

Complacency stops the journey of following Jesus on the way. There are seasons of my life where I let the phone go to voicemail because I didn’t want to hear about the next interruption on the horizon. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, described as a pastor, martyr, prophet, and spy during WWII, states in his book *Life Together*, “We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions. We may pass them by, preoccupied with our more important tasks, as the priest passed by the man who had fallen among thieves, perhaps—reading the Bible.”¹

As I entered this season, it became apparent that my seasons of life seemed to correspond to my vocation. Christian or not, our work drives our perceived circumstances and expectations. Unfortunately, our perspective of work often gets wrapped up in financially driven desires. Timothy Keller, esteemed author and pastor, comments on the lament of work as labor under the sun toiled in grief and pain in Ecclesiastes 2:22-23, “This is the experience of the person whose soul is resting wholly on the circumstances of their work.”² This error occurs when we view our faith as something in addition to our other life domains, such as health, family, and finance, as

discussed in earlier chapters.

Author and professor of theology at Whitworth University, Gerald Sittser, writes, “Christians did not accommodate to Rome. Neither did they isolate from Rome. Instead, they immersed themselves in the culture as followers of Jesus and agents of the kingdom, influencing it from within both as individuals and as a community.”³ During a phone interview with me, Dr. Sittser further shared that it’s about “who you are when you are not practicing religion.”⁴ Work is a missional pursuit to see not as just an opportunity to share our faith but as an opportunity to live out our faith. It is not a call to bring Jesus to the world. Our mission is to join God, who is already in the world. *(Len Sweet Quote?)

The church has fallen into a dependency on seeing discipleship as a process of equipping God’s people to grow God’s Kingdom, where we become the center of making that happen. Leonard Sweet eloquently states in his book, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There*, “A lot of times (read: most of the time) we are praying for things that God has already given us. ‘Open your eyes and look at the fields ... ripe for harvest.’ God has already given us the fields we need for our mission. We need to be nudged to ‘open our eyes and look.’”⁵ God doesn't need us; God chooses us. It’s all God’s already. The Kingdom of God is not something we grow. The Kingdom of God is everything we know.

I have often repeated a phrase that I heard early in my faith journey: the church is the hope of the world. While it may be a move forward from making me the center, it still falls short of the truth. Jesus is the hope of the world. It has always been Jesus. We don’t make it so. Our mission is to be seers who help others

see what is already there. We often question the need for Jesus to touch the blind man twice to heal him, as recorded in Mark 8:24, “The man looked around. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I see people, but I can’t see them very clearly. They look like trees walking around.’” Why do we assume Jesus didn’t heal him the first time? Len Sweet states in *Nudge*, “But there were two separate healings here.”⁶

What we are missing is asking how Jesus healed the blind man the first time. What should we be seeing? Sweet reminds us that Jesus wasn’t just showing us what to do. He showed us how to see. “Semiotics is an attempt to get our eyes off the chalkboard and into the real world. It is the art of making connections, linking disparate dots, seeing the relationships between apparently trifling matters, and turning them into metonymic moments.”⁷ This passage in Mark describes Jesus healing the man so that he sees both the micro and macro worlds. Before the blind man sees the person in front of him, he sees the forest of trees. Your mission is part of my Father’s Kingdom, Jesus is showing us. We must disciple others to see the forest around us semiotically and not get overwhelmed by the trees.

This chapter and season highlight the value of listening and the discipleship domain of mission. These two topics are vital in this post-pandemic era. They are in direct relation to our call to follow Jesus Christ. They are related because our mission begins with hearing the call. However, to listen to the call means we first must be aware of the caller and willing to respond to what we hear. Os Guinness, born in China to medical missionaries, author, and graduate of the Universities of London and Oxford, states in his book *The Call*, “Responding to the call means rising to the challenge, but in conversation and in partnership—and in

an intimate relationship between the called and the Caller.”⁸ Guinness additionally states, “Humanness is a response to God’s calling.”⁹ To be on mission at work and play means embracing the missional value of listening. The mission is not about doing more. The mission is about being more human.

As a young person undergoing several surgeries on my ear, I spent countless times in a hearing test booth. It can be a little intimidating if you have never been in one, especially when young. It resembles a vault with a massive thick door and a small double-pane window. When you step in and sit in the chair, the technician puts a headset on your head, then walks out and swings the vault door shut. You are now sealed in a box that is entirely soundproof with foam on the walls, so any sound you make is immediately silenced. Next, the technician turns the large dials to play a tone in one of your ears. You are instructed to use your fingers to indicate if you hear the tone. The tones change in frequency and get softer and softer until you can no longer hear them. It sounds easy, but when the tones get very low, there reaches a point when you are not sure if you heard it or just imagined it. You start to second-guess yourself. Is the tone playing in your head without the machine?

Then the test moves on to playing words. You then repeat the words into a microphone. When the words become very soft, you must stop focusing on what you hear and shift to listening. It is only through listening that you can distinguish the syllables. You find yourself holding your breath and leaning in to repeat the words you hear. But that is a struggle if you are not taking steps to listen. Listening takes a great deal of concentration and focus. The energy to listen is much greater than the effort to hear.

The value of learning the effort and focus required to listen to others becomes missional. Imagine what would happen to our ability to share the love of Jesus if we trusted what we know as truth in God's word enough to put our agenda on hold, lean in and listen to others regardless of their beliefs and be willing to be changed by what we hear? God is big enough to protect us from false teaching but personal enough to speak to us through others. We must push through simply hearing into the act of listening. To hold our breath if necessary so we could repeat what is said. To be willing to be altered by what is said. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, leaders of Barna Research and Q, write in their book *Good Faith*, "Good conversations demand active listening, mental and emotional engagement, openness to the possibility that we're wrong, and empathy to see the situation from the other person's point of view."¹⁰

There must be peace with the vulnerability to trust the nudging we hear from the voice within and we must listen with a willingness to be changed by what we hear. As God showed me in my business, learn to listen carefully and observe with a posture of receiving. By understanding others' wants and desires, we can help them see the joy of Jesus supplying their needs. Where we do it, according to Acts 1:8, is everywhere. In our backyard, our schools, our workplace, the gym, around people that make us feel uncomfortable, and anywhere we go around the globe. These aren't places that need us to bring Jesus. These are the places where Jesus wants us to catch up and follow Him there. We aren't bringing Jesus; Jesus is bringing us! It's not about us; it's about Jesus.

Prior to becoming a lead pastor, I became a bi-vocational pastor serving as both business owner and assistant pastor. Some

suggested that I should become a full-time pastor. While I imagine now that may have been a word from God at the time, I hesitated to agree. Traditionally, demonstrating a gift for leadership in the church leads to the logical next step of becoming a pastor. Os Guinness writes, “The truth of calling means that for followers of Christ, “everyone, everywhere, and in everything” lives the whole of life as a response to God’s call.”¹¹ He further states, “Ponder, for example, the fallacy of the contemporary Protestant term full-time Christian service—as if those not working for churches or Christian organizations are only part-time in the service of Christ.”¹² To think of discipleship as a series of steps that eventually get awarded by leadership in the church is to deny the majority of leadership God is doing outside the church.

In his book *The Other Six Days*, R. Paul Stevens, author, Professor Emeritus in Marketplace Theology, Regent College, Vancouver, BC, and Chairman of the Institute for Marketplace Transformation, states, “The Christian vocation summons us to take up the human vocation in its totality. We are not redeemed by Christ to become angels preparing for an immaterial heaven, but saved to become fully human beings serving God and God’s purposes in the world through the church.”¹³ When someone says they don’t feel called into ministry or don’t know where they are called, the biblical response should be a question, “Where do you work?” Because that’s where Jesus spends most of His time. Instead of asking, “Where am I called to go?” know that you are already there and ask, “How am I called where I am?” Marketplace Ministry isn’t business doing church; it’s the church doing business. Our work is the mission.

Do you hear God calling? Then lean in, hold your breath,

and listen. Jesus is waiting for your response. He isn't calling you to pull away from the world; He is calling you into the world. So, follow Jesus into the marketplace with the power of the Holy Spirit and work in it!

Sample Small Group Questions

1. Who do you find it most difficult to listen to and why?
2. What do you find difficult about listening with a willingness to be changed by what you hear?
3. How might putting the other person first in a conversation look to you?
4. What steps can you take now to see yourself on mission at your workplace outside of sharing your faith?

Chapter 5

SERVANT FOLLOWER

Leading from behind.

"Father, if you are willing, please take this
cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will
to be done, not mine."

Luke 22:42

Kingdom Value: Submission

Discipleship Domain: Service

You don't find leadership; leadership finds you. This epiphany struck me while getting my MDiv. This would provide a mantra for leading leaders as a pastor. In contrast, has the church elevated leadership to be seen as a milestone of mature discipleship?

This chapter focuses on the Kingdom Value of what it means to trust in submission and to understand our relationship to authority. A leader is the opposite of a controller. Christ's witness of obedience was not for His benefit but for His followers. Additionally, it focuses on the Discipleship Domain of Service. Understanding what it means to serve others before ourselves is a personal commandment and a clarion call for the church body.

Sample Small Group Questions

1. What does independence mean to you?
2. When you hear the word authority, how does it make you feel?
3. Where in your life do you struggle with authority?
4. What steps can you take now to see submission as a strength and a dependance on the Holy Spirit?

Working Resources

The Cost of Discipleship - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Eric Metaxas

Finding God's Life for My Will: His Presence Is the Plan - Mike Donehey

Sanctity without Starch: A Layperson's Guide to a Wesleyan Theology of Grace - Robert G. Tuttle, Jr.

Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ - Eugene H. Peterson

I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus - Leonard Sweet

Strong in the Broken Places: A Theological Reverie on the Ministry of George Everett Ross - Leonard Sweet

Renovated: God, Dallas Willard, and the Church That Transforms - E. James Wilder

Calling & Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life - William H. Willimon

Chapter 6

KINGDOM LIVING

Recoding discipleship.

"You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life."

JOHN 5:39-40

Incarnate living with a Pentecost expectation!

When did faith become a slice of our lives alongside health, finance, marriage, social relationships, and serving the church? It's time to recode discipleship. When faith rules all life domains, it's called "Kingdom living." To be a thriving church is defined by people who are in pursuit of faithfully giving all of their life domains to Jesus. Telling the church that certain parts of our lives are not a church matter is like telling Jesus that parts of our lives are none of His business. So, what does discipleship look like when followers of the way give it all to Jesus and live with Holy Spirit power? This chapter brings together the first five chapters and develops a different picture of what discipleship looks like when faith is at the center, and loving relationships flow through all life domains.

Sample Small Group Questions

1. What relationships are most important to you?
2. Are there areas in your life that you need to abandon to follow Jesus?
3. Have you considered relationships with money, work, and health part of your faith life?
4. What steps can you take now to understand discipleship as life outside the church?

Working Resources

Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity - Luke Bretherton

Celebration of Discipline, Special Anniversary Edition: The Path to Spiritual Growth - Richard J. Foster

Think, Act, Be Like Jesus: Becoming a New Person in Christ - Randy Frazee, and Robert Noland

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God - Timothy Keller

The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire - Alan Kreider

God Is Closer Than You Think: This Can Be the Greatest Moment of Your Life Because This Moment Is the Place Where You Can Meet God - John Ortberg

The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters - Priya Parker

From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed - Leonard Sweet

The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work - Leonard Sweet

Chapter 7

CROSSING TOGETHER

Pilgrimage of faith.

"They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity - all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved."

Acts 2:46-47

When God brings the Tribes together a new thing happens!

Now together, we arrive at the same spot, much like the tribes of Israel when they arrived at the Jordan on the edge of the promised land. But they had to get their feet wet before the waters would part. It's not a journey; it's a pilgrimage. A journey has a destination in mind. Like the disciples of Jesus, only our rabbi knows where we are going. A place where trust and faith merge. As tribes, we are entering a renewed baptism and discovering what it means to see the signs of Jesus in the world. Who patiently waits for the church to catch up to begin a new thing. You have just heard the why, it's time to discuss how!

Sample Small Group Questions

1. Have you considered yourself on a pilgrimage with Jesus?
2. Where have you seen Jesus in the most unlikely places?
3. Are there lessons from the post-pandemic era that you think would be valuable to further understand or successes that would benefit other church leaders?
4. What steps can you take now to answer the call of Jesus to “follow me” and teach others as Jesus taught us along the way?

Working Resources

Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication - Crystal L. Downing

You're Not Listening: What You're Missing and Why It Matters - Kate Murphy

Leading Change Without Losing It: Five Strategies That Can Revolutionize How You Lead Change When Facing Opposition - Carey Nieuwhof, and Reggie Joiner.

Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation - Parker J. Palmer

11: Indispensable Relationships You Can't Be Without - Leonard Sweet

Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future - Leonard Sweet, and Mark Chironna

“Two in Five Christians Are Not Engaged in Discipleship.” Accessed January 21, 2023. <https://www.barna.com/research/christians-discipleship-community/> - Barna Group

Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices - Frank Viola, and George Barna

God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath - N. T. Wright

ENDNOTES

Chapter 4: Outside The Walls

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 78.

² Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 104.

³ Gerald L. Sittser, *Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 174.

⁴ Dr. Gerald Sittser. Interview by author. Phone. November 2, 2022.

⁵ Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There*, New edition (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010), 220-221.

⁶ Sweet, *Nudge*, 220.

⁷ Sweet, *Nudge*, 41.

⁸ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling God's Purpose For Your Life*, Expanded, Revised, Anniversary edition (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 53.

⁹ Guinness, *The Call*, 52.

¹⁰ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Good Faith: Being a Christian When Society Thinks You're Irrelevant and Extreme*, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 17.

¹¹ Guinness, *The Call*, 62.

¹² Guinness, *The Call*, 62.

¹³ R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective*, First Paperback

Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 88.

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Appendix 2: Survey Open-Text Responses

"This is the opportunity and possible strength of the coming generation. They are compelled to work together. I call it the Big Bang Mealtime. They don't sit at a table but couches. They all eat something different but yet they communicate. When you ask this new generations what they want to do they say "We just want to be together."

"Personal testimony is the best way to communicate with others of my faith"

"I believe personal testimony is the most effective way of winning people to Christ. After all He modeled this for us."

"I love it all except the book cover I think that needs to be more captivating To draw folks in to this exceptional and insightful material that is desperately needed in these last days."

"Discipleship needs a major rework in most churches and denominations. See Sonlife.com. Sonlife is a discipleship based on how Jesus engaged people and called them further."

"The book's introduction seems long and somewhat repetitive. I'm guessing that will be addressed in editing."

"It is boldly evangelical."

"You ask the right questions to get people motivated."

"I felt like the website was a bit too busy. What I mean by that is there was a ton of information. I felt a little overwhelmed."

"It left me with the question of are churches in trouble with communicating with people especial young adults."

(I like) "How it engages Pastors with congregants"

"Story telling and an extremely professional website."

"I liked that the book addressed real world - today issues especially on the heels of the pandemic. And I feel some of the solutions/direction will begin tough conversations believers and churches should have. Will they? That remains to be seen. I love the website although I had a few challenges moving through it on my iphone."

"The material in every way was excellent! Very engaging. Very thoughtful and fresh. Real concepts that are desperately needed and missing in the church today! This is real bible truth; not a theory! And I believe this could wake up multitudes in the church if it can get into their hands. Well done!"

"I think this looks like a lot of work went into it and it was very well done. Great job Brian!"

"You could also use the analogy that discipleship is not a factory way to stamp out more believers but a natural birthing and nurturing to produce a full grown Christ follower that then produces another full grown Christ follower. Most humans can reproduce, most Christians can reproduce also. I have 4 children, people think this is a big family. (My friend has 17!) So really we should expect a Christians to reproduce 2? maybe three or 4 other Christians in their lifetime. Good for you. I pray that God opens new doors and conversations with pastors and other Christians who are frustrated by the lack of discipleship they see."

"I'm looking forward to reading the entire book."

"I like where you are going Brian."

"I believe young adults are very guarded on sharing of their thoughts."

"The content is pertinent to our social economic state."

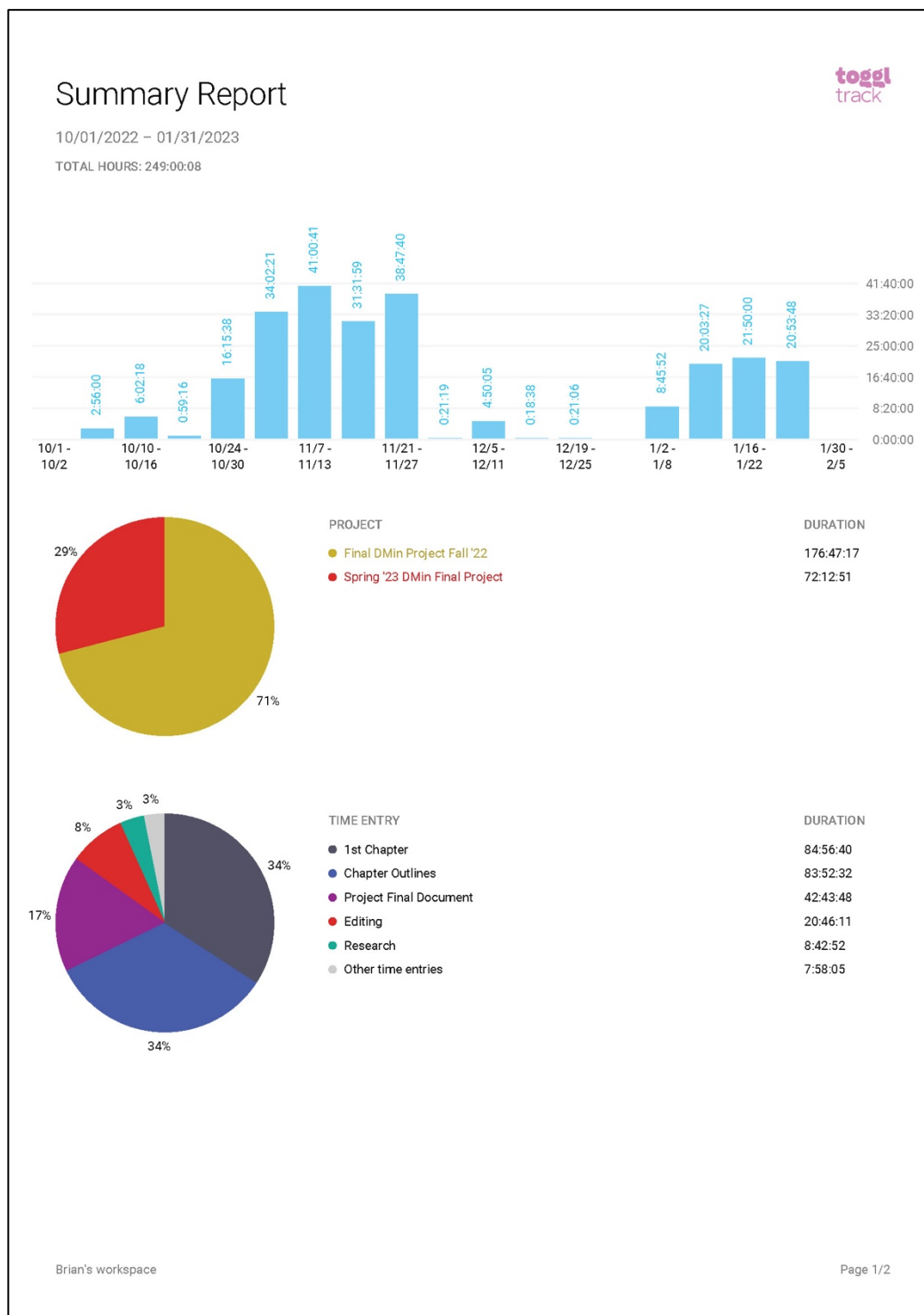
"MINOR- there is a double space on page 13. The story telling is good."

"Wow Brian! I did not know this was "in" you but I felt something like this was. Thank you for listening to your heart. I look forward to reading the finished product completely and applying some of the concepts and helping to begin the conversations we all must have. Time is short."

"The work is very good as you used new ways of expressing old concepts that are biblical but needed a fresh approach. Your new material & way of explaining it was both stimulating & effective. I wonder if you struggled with using the word Ecclesia rather than Church? Of course, it would have added a rather strong & long explanation which might be my answer. Excellent job of using yourself, not easy to do! Keep your hand to the plow brother your work could be the thing the Lord uses to unleash his bride!! May it be so!!!"

Appendix 3: Project Time Sheets

Note: Time spent on book cover and website (copy and design) produced by me are not included in the time sheets below.

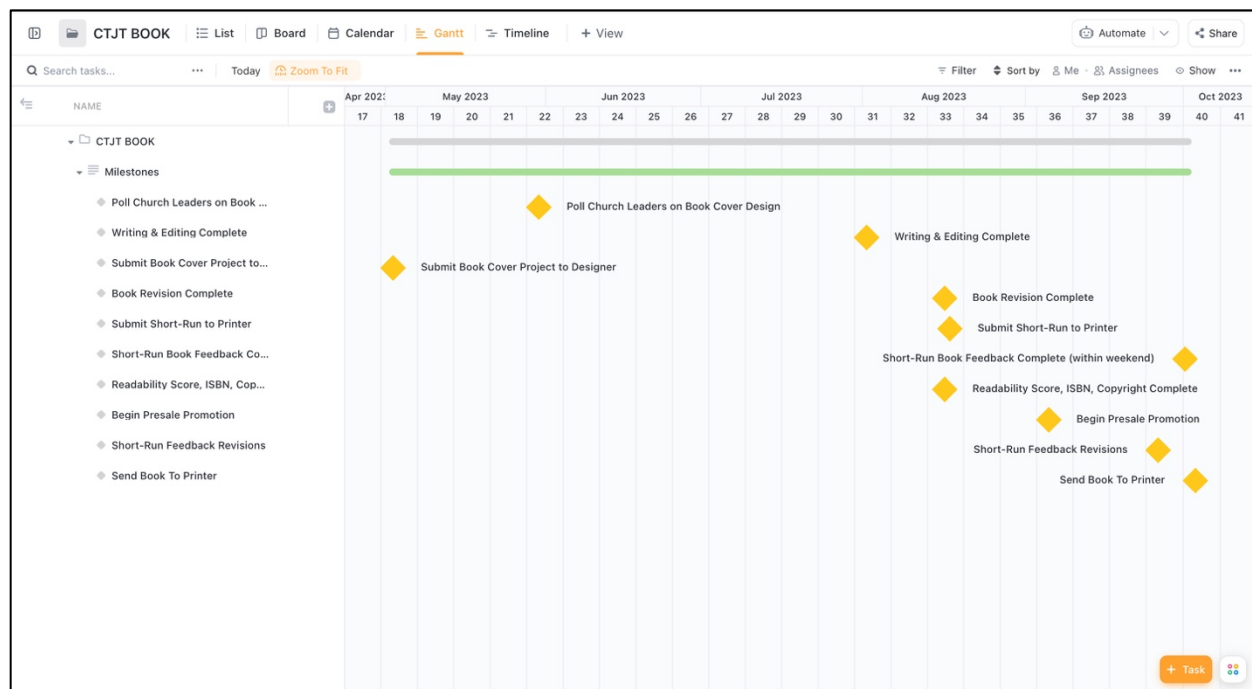




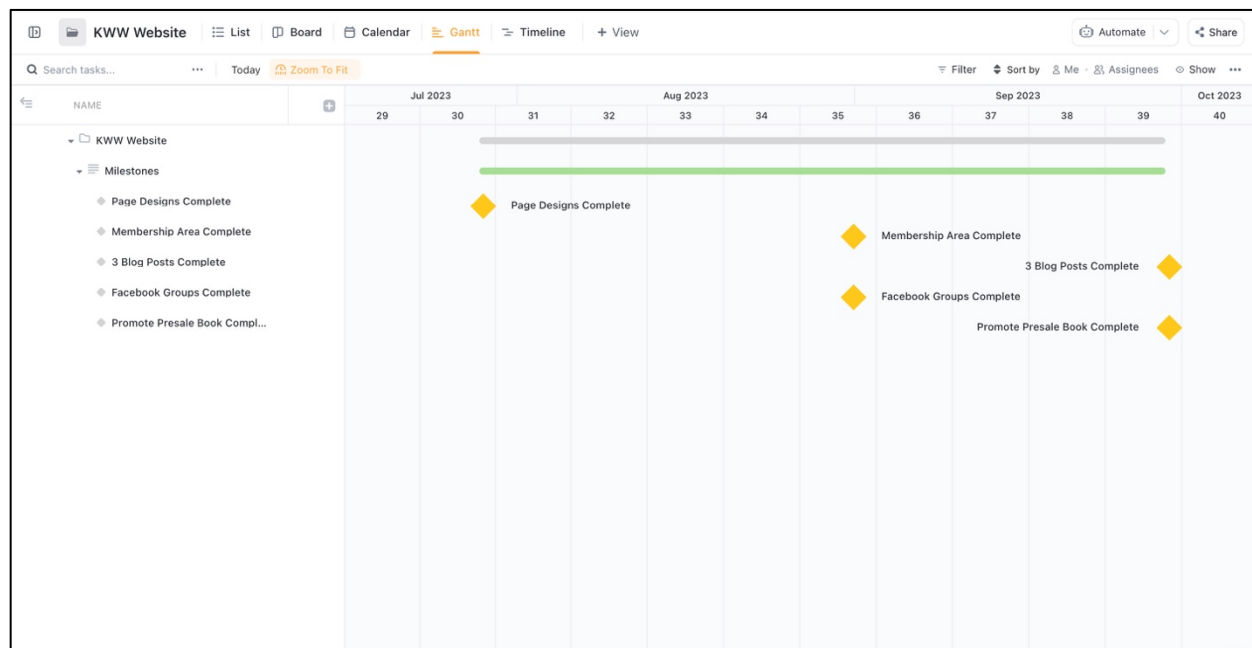
PROJECT - TIME ENTRY	DURATION	PERCENTAGE
● Final DMin Project Fall '22	176:47:17	71.0%
1st Chapter	84:56:40	34.11%
Chapter Outlines	83:52:32	33.68%
Final Survey	5:34:24	2.24%
IRB	2:23:41	0.96%
● Spring '23 DMin Final Project	72:12:51	29.0%
Editing	20:46:11	8.34%
Project Final Document	42:43:48	17.16%
Research	8:42:52	3.5%

Appendix F—Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation

Book Production Milestones



Website Production Milestones



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