MOBILIZING CHRIST-FOLLOWERS FOR KINGDOM MINISTRY

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... fan into flame the gift of God which is in you...

For the Spirit of God did not give us a spirit of timidity,

but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1:6-7
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ABSTRACT

Beginning in the 1970s, a plethora of spiritual gift discovery tools were developed by church leaders inspired to make “every member a minister.” Despite the good intentions of these materials, the emphasis centered on the benefits of spiritual gifts discovery to individuals and the body of Christ—on the “Spirit being given to the church.”

Reggie McNeal, R. Paul Stevens, Frank Tillapaugh, and several others contend the lay ministry movement has essentially directed Christians toward ministry inside their church, rather than mobilizing Christians to be Christ’s ministering body in their everyday world beyond the church.

The thesis herein is this: the church must mobilize Christ-followers for Kingdom ministry—service in Jesus’ name and the Spirit’s power—that embodies God’s Kingdom in the world they encounter every day.

As Jesus was sent by the Father, so Jesus sent his disciples, to give visible form to God’s Kingdom. Within scarcely two centuries of Jesus’ ascension, Christians went from gathering in houses to dedicated church buildings, and simultaneously, the “clergy” emerged. Jesus’ Kingdom ministry was soon eclipsed by Church ministry. Ministry was reduced to select services, performed by a select group of people, for a select group of people, often inside the walls of a select building.

With the missional movement in full swing, the Church is once again poised to mobilize Christ-followers for Kingdom ministry. The missional Church is “a church given to

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the Spirit”¹ and understands “spiritual gifts” as ministries the Holy Spirit manifests through believers—not only to serve the body of Christ, but also the world God loves. The accompanying artifact is a small group curriculum designed to guide Christ-followers in discerning their Holy Spirit-appointed Kingdom ministry, both in their church and the world they encounter every day.

¹ Ibid.
SECTION 1

THE PROBLEM
Chapter 1

“Every Member a Minister”: An Elusive Vision

Brad and Christy are a talented, college-educated, and highly committed Christian couple with two kids and another one on the way. They have been attending a fast-growing, three-year-old church plant led by an enthusiastic, missionally minded young pastor. The entrepreneurial pastor and his young family reflect the demographic of the community and the church was bustling with young families. Brad and Christy are thrilled to have found a church home like this and recently took the step of attending a membership class and becoming members.

During the four-hour class, they learned about the mission, vision, and core values—the “DNA,” as the pastor likes to call it—of the church. By the end of the class it was clear that in this particular church, there were two expectations for new members: 1) that they would participate in a small home Bible study group and, 2) that they would exercise their spiritual gifts in at least one ministry.

Brad and Christy each completed an eight-page SHAPE-inspired questionnaire at home between the two membership class sessions. The questionnaire Brad and Christy used was customized for this particular church plant setting, but contained the standard components found in similar “lay mobilization” tools—popular assessments for determining one’s spiritual gifts, heart passion, personality, talent, education and life experiences, spiritual maturity, and finally, availability for ministry.

By completing the customized SHAPE tool, Brad and Christy got to reflect on and gain further self-awareness of several aspects of their life: their education, training, and life.
experiences, their spiritual birth and development, their spiritual gifts, their area(s) of “ministry passion,” and their availability to serve. During the second membership class session, they spent an hour analyzing and sharing their SHAPE responses in a guided group process. The group interaction was meant to help each new member distill eight pages of their SHAPE responses down to two or three primary spiritual gifts, a “ministry passion statement,” and an estimate for a realistic amount of time they could be available to serve in a ministry.

Brad and Christy enjoyed the process of reflecting on their lives and unique God-given SHAPE, but when it came to the group discernment process, they struggled to be confident in identifying their spiritual gifts and articulating their “ministry passion” and felt shaky about how and where they might apply them in ministry. It soon became evident that the fast-growing church had a shortage of volunteers in some key program areas. The young church of under 200 members wanted to have a fully staffed worship team (instrumentalists and vocalists), a fully staffed, graded Sunday School, a fully staffed mid-week children's program, a fully staffed usher/greeter corps, and finally, an ever growing cadre of qualified small group leaders available to start up new small groups at two key junctures each year. And because the church had recently gone to having two services, almost double the number of volunteers was required. Lastly, the goal was for as many of these positions as possible to be once- or twice-a-month rotations so they appeared to be “easy” commitments for today’s time-squeezed volunteers. The demand created by all these church ministry openings (mostly to support Sunday morning worship and education/discipleship ministries) definitely challenged the supply of volunteers.

So although Brad—a college graduate who had traveled the world, lived overseas, and worked in public policy and international affairs—had narrowed his spiritual gifts down to leadership, administration, and creative communication with a heart concern for the
world’s less fortunate, he decided to serve as an usher and in children’s ministry. Brad was temporarily agreeable to filling those church jobs out of a sense of duty as a new member, but before long he began to wonder, “Is this the only use for my spiritual gifts? Or my travels? Or my communication skills? Or my heart desire to look outward to the less fortunate?” He quietly questioned if the church was occupying his finite volunteer time in ministry roles that others could fill—or maybe the church could live without.

Christy was a stay-at-home mom who hosted candle parties for fun and a little extra income, but this young woman also had a college degree in business, accounting, and computer science. She was a gifted administrator who said that an organizing, planning type role would be a perfect fit for her. She had previously worked at a battered women and children’s center, and her heart interest was protecting children in vulnerable circumstances. Yet, along with her husband, she settled for ushering and serving in children’s Sunday school at the church. An ideal ministry role that connected her gifts, education, and concern for at-risk children now became like an distant dream because she discovered that her church really only encouraged compassion-motivated service “to the least of these” as an afterthought—after it had fully served itself.

At the new member’s class, the students were encouraged to think in a broad, open-ended way about all the experiences and attributes with which God had shaped their lives and to search for a ministry where each could utilize their spiritual gifts from a place of true passion. But the moment of reckoning came when the new members were asked to choose a place where they could serve in ministry. They were told of the church’s needs and volunteer opportunities, but the reality was that most of the opportunities had to do with offering a quality worship experience and serving the church’s faithful with the programs they had come to expect.
More often than not, any dreams new members may have of matching their spiritual gifts and ministry passions to other ministries within the church, let alone outside, are put on the shelf, except for those few whose gifts and dreams do happen to match an urgent need in the church. Sadly, in most churches, those are the exception, not the rule; for many, there are no easy fits.
Chapter 2
The Scope of the Problem and Thesis

Brad and Christy’s church is making an admirable, intentional effort to help people discover their spiritual gifts and connect them in a ministry. In the process, Brad and Christy identified and shared their burden for very real and specific kinds of suffering they contact in their world. Yet the SHAPE discovery process did not guide them into perfect-10 ministries inside the body of Christ, and did even less to help them minister to the less fortunate or at-risk children outside in the world God loves.

Like many well-intentioned churches, this church unwittingly monopolized both Brad and Christy’s limited volunteer ministry time with “church work”—ministry jobs created largely by services the church provides for, in this case, middle-class church-goers.

Unfortunately, Brad and Christy’s church is not unique. Generally speaking, the popular effort to make “every member a minister” has oriented members toward ministry inside the body of Christ, without mobilizing them to be Christ’s ministering body in the world.

The following survey of relevant literature will attest that the church’s tendency to monopolize its members in service on its own behalf is a problem well-substantiated by numerous scholars over that last several decades. Reggie McNeal points his finger specifically at the recent spiritual gift discovery emphasis:

Every time I see the slogan “every member a minister” I cringe. It usually means that there has been a lot of effort put into getting church members to get church work done. . . .

. . . In more recent decades the emphasis on spiritual gifts has often been associated with helping church members find their “ministry fit.” Unfortunately, the scripting of ministry opportunities based on gift “discoveries” most usually ties back to church responsibilities. Many church members have come to see spiritual gift inventories as a recruiting tool for the nominating committee and church staff to use in ‘mining’ church members’ talent to fill church jobs.  

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McNeal’s allegation is recent (2003), but a half a century ago in 1954, Dutch theologian Hendrik Kraemer (a father of the modern lay ministry movement), wrote a prophetic and what could be called church-shattering book, *A Theology of the Laity*. In it, he fervently challenged the church’s “pernicious tendency” toward “Church-centeredness,” and expounded on the church’s mission and ministry in a way that rivals the most current missional theologians:

> In justice to the whole account of the history of God’s self-disclosure, aiming at the salvation and redemption of the world, it must be stated as a first point that God is concerned about the world. In all that has happened in Christ, the whole of mankind is in God’s view. The Church is provisional, not definitive. Consequently, the Church does not primarily exist on behalf of itself, but on behalf of the world. Strange to say, this elementary truth, which finds ready intellectual assent, is nevertheless absent in the Church. . . . It is Church-centered. It is self-centered. The interest in the world is at best a side issue. The concern, one may even say the burning concern about the world and its needs, which fills the Bible, which is the impelling power behind that whole history of God’s self-disclosure, does not find a real reflection in the “normal” attitude of the “normal” Churches and in the attitude of its “normal” members.

> And yet, this all-pervading concern about the world in need, about the world in its lostness (even in its great achievements and triumphs) is basic to the true meaning of the Church. . . .

> . . . The Church by being *world-centered* in the image of the divine example, is really the Church. Being Church-centered, regarding the world of the Church as the safe refuge from the world, is a betrayal of its nature and calling. Only by not being or not wanting to be an end in itself, the Church arrives at being the Church. ³

Over the last fifty years, there has been a steady chorus of analogous commentary that has been muted by the church-centered church. We will re-examine the voices behind this theme, following them up to the present.

Not long after Kraemer, Howard Grimes and Hans-Ruedi Weber offered a similar critique of the American church in 1963:

> Serious questions have been raised concerning much of the American Church’s understanding of the laity and the work currently being carried on by [laypersons]. It is too much church-centered, too little world-centered. Too much of what the church

now does is to use [laypersons] rather than helping the laity be the Church in the world.  

Neill and Weber go on to describe the truly “charismatic” church and its priestly ministry on behalf of the world:

To be a charismatic Church means to exist for service [in the world], because it belongs to the essence of each charisma not to be used for self-edification but to be spent for others. And to fulfill the priestly ministry means nothing less than that the priestly people are ‘permitted and enabled to share in the continuing high-priestly work of Christ by offering themselves in love and obedience to God and in love and service of men.’ True lay movements look beyond the world of the Churches and draw them into the movement of God’s love for the world.

Around the same time, Georgia Harkness expresses her concern that the laymen’s perception of his/her Christian service is wrongly limited to service inside the institutionalized church:

What is to be deplored is the [layperson’s] seeing [his/her] Christian duty as limited to being a handyman in the institutional structure of the Church, with no awareness that in [his/her] daily occupation, [his/her] political responsibilities, and [his/her] community contacts, [he/she] is the Church within the world.

In 1978, Thomas Gillespie echoes the same, and provides us with the helpful distinction between “church work” and “the work of the church”:

When prevalent attitudes toward the identity and ministry of the Christian laity are viewed in Biblical perspective, the necessity of a “new direction” becomes painfully evident. The direction required involves movement that is both upward and outward—upward from an identity as second-class members of the community of faith to a status of full privilege and responsibility, and outward from a narrow preoccupation with the internal affairs of ecclesiastical institutions (church work) to a broad participation in the ministry of all the members to the world (the work of the church).

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In the early 1980s, Nelvin Vos reiterated the same ideas, at times using identical language:

In the past the term ‘lay ministry’ too frequently has meant a kind of ‘clericalizing the laity’ to assist the pastor. Such a view only confuses the tasks of pastor and people, and still more seriously, neglects the mission of the church: to be Christ’s living body in the world. What needs to be absolutely clear is that the ministry of the laity involves an understanding of the nature, purpose, and mission of the church. What we are talking about is not simply what lay people can or should do: teach Sunday school, usher, sing in choirs, assist in communion, or even occasionally pray and preach. Important as each one of these activities is, and they must continue to be nurtured, the major focus of this discussion will be on the laity in the world, in those arenas of faith and daily life outside the congregation. To relate one’s faith in Christ to living in the ordinary, the mundane, the secular, the suffering world—that is what the people of God are called to do.\(^8\)

Also during the 1980s, Marlene Wilson contributed a major lay ministry “how-to” manual, *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*. From that point, we see the term “lay mobilization” in church literature. Wilson describes her frustrating efforts in the trenches with church leaders to convince them to recognize and release their church members for ministry in the world:

One of the clearest directives to Christians is to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). That most certainly does not mean that we simply are all to be active in our congregations or parishes. We are called to minister in our vocations and occupations, our communities, and the world as well. The church does not exist to be served but to provide and equip servants. As someone said, "It is to be a launching pad, not a hangar."\(^9\)

Frank Tillapaugh, after his renowned book *Unleashing the Church* (1982), wrote an equally important, yet lesser known book *Calling* in 1993. In *Calling* he shares the realities of working with churches to mobilize the laity for ministry outside the church in the world. He made the following observations during his travels as a consultant and workshop leader:

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The church slogan may say, “Every Member a Minister,” but in reality, translating the slogan into the life of the church remains a universal frustration. . . .

Think about worship, edification and mission, and the way we actually do church. Clearly 98% of what occupies most church’s time and resources is limited to worship and edification. This includes worship services, preaching, music, offerings, Sunday School, youth programs, nurseries, socials, Bible studies, boards and committees, and confirmation classes. The list of normal church activities are both vertical (worship) and horizontal (edification), but there is a catch: they are all done by the congregation for the congregation. . . .

And, believe it or not, a strong emphasis on edification does not often generate mission. 10

In the late 1990s, R. Paul Stevens joined Tillapaugh and the others in confronting the church on its “half-measures” in making “every member a minister” and neglect in recognizing its members’ service for God in the world:

Most efforts at recovering the New Testament version of every member ministry are half-measures. They focus on the Christian in the church—lay preachers, lay pastoral care-givers and lay worship leaders. What is needed is a comprehensive biblical foundation for the Christian’s life in the world as well as the church, a theology for homemakers, nurses and doctors, plumbers, stockbrokers, politicians and farmers. 11

In the twenty-first century, the church, by now familiar with the missional concept and terminology, wants to think it is reaching out, but it is still mostly focused on doing the things that go on inside church walls. Derek Christensen, a leader in the marketplace mission movement, makes this observation in 2005:

Yet, when we examine much of the “outreach” activity of many local churches, we find it heavily weighted towards programmes based on church buildings and structures. The big event, the special series, the guest speaker, all tend to operate in the one environment. 12

In the 2009 reader for Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, missiologist Ralph Winter maintains that the church is still confusing “Church Mission” with “Kingdom Mission.”

10 Frank R. Tillapaugh and Rich Hurst, Calling (Colorado Springs: Dreamtime, 1997), 42, 34, 36.


For the average lay person, Church Mission, the mission to promote and extend the Church as an institution, is described as the “pray and give type of “after hours” Christianity.” Church Mission together with Kingdom Mission should be a 24/7 “full-time Christian” type of Christianity. What does “full time Christian” mean? It means that the mission to promote the Kingdom, or Kingdom Mission, involves, or should involve every move a lay person makes in his forty-hour work week in addition to he may do for the church “after hours” in Church Mission. . . .

Many pastors call for people not only to believe, but to be willing to “serve Jesus Christ.” However, they may mean teach Sunday School, help in the nursery, usher in church services, or support missionaries. . . . For them, to promote either the Kingdom of God or the Church is essentially the same thing. The Lord’s Prayer then becomes too often “Our kingdom come” as the Church is concerned with the personal and spiritual fulfillment of its individual members, its building plans, etc., not the solution of problems beyond its boundaries.13

Richard Stearns’ recently published The Hole in Our Gospel contains a chapter entitled “Two Percent of Two Percent.” Although this chapter speaks to the American church’s stewardship of its financial resources rather than its human resources, the data is likewise incriminating, and completely consistent with the allegations herein. The church tends to primarily serve itself, while remaining relatively unresponsive to needs of the world outside. Stearns points out that American church members gave a higher percentage of their income to the church during the Great Depression (3.3 percent) than they did in 2005 (2.58 percent):

If we then look at where the money goes after it is received by churches, we find that just about 2 percent of it goes to overseas missions of any kind, whether evangelistic or to assist the poor. The other 98% stays right here within our churches and communities. The bottom line is that the commitment that American Christians, the wealthiest Christians in all history, are making to the world is just about 2 percent—actually about five ten-thousandths of our income.14

Although this data has to do with “treasure,” it correlates exactly to Tillapaugh’s observation, noted earlier. The same 98/2 percent split exists when it comes to where American church

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members invest their “time and talent”; 98 percent goes inside the church for themselves, and 2 percent goes outside for others.

For the last few decades, churches have enthusiastically promoted programs designed to help members answer the “ministry calling” question: What is my spiritual gift within the body of Christ to be used in service for the sake of the church? There is nothing inherently wrong with assisting members of the body of Christ in discovering and using their spiritual gifts for the common good; that is indisputably scriptural according to 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, Eph. 4, and other passages. The problem is that the church has been content to stop there and effectively confine its members’ ministry to the body of Christ, keeping them from discovering and playing their part as a member of Christ’s ministering body to the world. The thesis herein presents a new challenge to churches: the church must mobilize Christ-followers for Kingdom ministry—service in Jesus’ name and the Spirit’s power—that embodies God’s Kingdom in the world they encounter every day. The true end to making every member a minister is this: “The whole ministry is given to the whole church for the whole world.”

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15 Vos, 156.
Chapter 3

Limiters

Given the whole of scripture and over two millennia of church history, the subject of ministry is vast and notoriously difficult to define. “Ministry,” in its broadest sense, is an all-inclusive term.

For example, Stevens suggests the following comprehensive definition:

. . . [Ministry is] putting ourselves at the disposal of God for God's purposes in the church and world.
. . . [W]ho are the ministers? The whole people of God as community is God's true ministerium in both its gathered life (ekklesia) and its dispersed life (diaspora). . . .
. . . [How] is ministry undertaken? What form does it take? It is in both word and deed, both overtly and covertly, to persons and to organizations, both directly and indirectly. . . .
. . . [W]here is ministry undertaken? Service from God and for God takes place in both the church and the world. 16

Several limiters are needed in order to focus this project. It is not the author’s intent to present the issue herein as an either/or issue, nor is the suggested solution meant to supersede all previous “ministry discovery” programs. Rather, this project is presented in response to the church’s tendency to promote ministry for its own sake (within the body of Christ) at the expense of its whole ministry (witnessing, serving, and actualizing God’s in-breaking Kingdom for the sake of the world). The solution presented aims to correct that specific problem.

First, in relation to the whole of scripture, relatively little attention will be given to the biblical precedent for spiritual gifts–based ministry for the common good inside the body of Christ. The point of this dissertation is the Christian’s ministry outside the body of Christ—how members of the body of Christ also have a Holy Spirit–assigned part to play in being Christ’s ministering body in the world.

16 Stevens 157, 8
Secondly, little attention will be given to what the Epistles say in regard to the church’s structure and task. Rather, this dissertation will revisit the occupation of the church in light of Jesus’ earthly ministry in the gospels and the risen Christ’s (a.k.a. the Holy Spirit’s) work through believers in the earliest church in Acts. In these texts we are able to observe the ministry of Jesus and his followers before there were institutionalized church structures in which to serve. We will heed the rather neglected premise other scholars note below:

1. “Jesus’ ministry not only established the paradigm on which the Christian church’s ministry would be founded, it also put in place the principal components out of which Christian theology developed. Thus, Jesus’ ministry must be regarded as an essential element of New Testament teaching. It should certainly not be pushed aside to make room for more systematic presentations found in the New Testament letters and epistles, as is sometimes done. For Christians, Jesus’ ministry is not only inspirational but also doctrinally normative and ecclesiologically formative.”

2. “Scholars have been too quick to reject Acts and the Gospels as a source for doctrine or practice.”

3. “Kingdom ministry has been almost totally eclipsed by church ministry. Ministry is viewed as advancing the church rather than the Kingdom. The letters are the primary guide; the gospels have been eclipsed.”

Third, as we observe Jesus’ ministry focused predominantly around promoting the Kingdom and not the church, this dissertation will give much attention to understanding the

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19 Stevens, 47.
Kingdom and little to institutionalized church structures.

Fourth, with our attention directed to the outward ministry of the church, we are necessarily led into the topic of mission. For further clarity and simplicity here, I will utilize Newbigin’s understanding of the word “mission” as distinct from evangelism, the former referring to “the church’s wider vocation in the world,” and the latter reserved for verbal proclamation of the gospel.\(^{20}\) Certainly, Jesus commissioned his followers to bear witness to him in both word and deed; he sent his disciples out preaching and healing. It is not biblical, nor is it my intent to separate the two, or elevate one over the other. However, since the goal of this project is to reorient the church’s whole ministry outward toward the whole world, and numerous resources exist to equip believers for verbal proclamation, the focus herein will be upon Kingdom ministry as defined by Howard Snyder: “any service carried out in the name of Jesus that serves people or nature and shows forth God’s rule in the world.”\(^{21}\)

Fifth, Kingdom ministry is further distinguished from secular varieties of “social action.” It is dependent on the Holy Spirit in terms of appointment, discernment, and empowerment.

Finally, all claims, arguments, and conclusions will be presented from an evangelical perspective (bounded by the statement of faith of George Fox Evangelical Seminary) and addressed in the context of the American Church.


SECTION 2

A HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM
Chapter 4

Jesus’ Kingdom Ministry

Introduction

This chapter will look at Jesus’ ministry in the context of God’s Kingdom. Having built a thorough understanding of the Kingdom, the stage is set to understand the Church’s role in God’s Kingdom. Special attention will be given to what constitutes ministry in the Kingdom and who are the recipients of ministry in the Kingdom. The chapter will conclude with a definition of “Kingdom ministry.”

Although the term “Kingdom ministry,” is not found as such in the Bible, the Kingdom is frequently mentioned. It is noteworthy that Jesus is only recorded speaking about the church (ekklesia) twice, and that is twice in a single gospel, Matthew. However, Jesus is recorded speaking about the Kingdom (basileia) over 120 times throughout all four gospels. The Kingdom is the ultimate objective of Jesus’ ministry:

God’s kingdom should be the objective of the Christian community. The church is to be a means to that end, and not an end in itself. . . .

...Since the church is the primary vehicle of God’s work on earth, it would be difficult to overstate its importance. And that is exactly the point. . . .

The church is the vehicle, the kingdom is the objective.”

Jesus never asked his followers to grow the church. Instead he said, “. . . I will build my church . . . . I will give you [Peter and the followers of Jesus] the keys of the kingdom.”

Jesus gave his followers the keys to a Kingdom venture, not a church building.

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1 Matt. 16:18; 18:17.

2 Tillapaugh and Hurst, 44-5.

3 Protestants understand “you” to mean all of Christ’s followers while Roman Catholics understand “you” to refer to Peter alone and cite this verse as a basis for apostolic succession. Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 343, 371.

4 Matt. 16:18-19.
The Kingdom

In books, journals, and websites, the concept of God’s Kingdom is currently enjoying a resurgence of attention among theologians. Reviewing some of the recent literature will yield substantial clarification to this word that is finding its way back into church parlance. Kingdom must be properly understood before it is used as an adjective in the expression “Kingdom ministry.”

Richard McBrien suggests a succinct definition: “The kingdom exists wherever and whenever the will of God is operative, wherever and whenever the will of God is fulfilled.”

Tillapaugh and Hurst similarly say, “In short, God’s kingdom breaks into human history whenever and wherever God’s will is done.” These are adequate macro-statements. However, there are many aspects to the Kingdom that require elaboration.

First, the Kingdom has commonly, but mistakenly, been equated with the church. The two are far from one and the same:

A connection exists between kingdom and Church, but they are not identical, even in the present age. The kingdom is the whole of God’s redeeming activity in Christ in this world; the Church is the assembly of those who belong to Jesus Christ. Perhaps one could speak in terms of two concentric circles, of which the Church is the smaller and the kingdom is the larger, while Christ is the centre of both.

Fung and Pinnock buttress the idea that the kingdom is something beyond the church. The church is a human entity made up of mortals who cannot in and of themselves claim to be the Kingdom of God. Rather, the church serves the Kingdom as its herald and witness. Among others, Fung and Pinnock also call the church “provisional”:

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6 Tillapaugh and Hurst, 45.

In the same way, the Kingdom, being the goal of the church, remains paradoxical. Every redeemed mortal must seek earnestly the Kingdom, but no mortal has the right to proclaim a human entity to be the Kingdom of God. . . . The church will remain that entity constantly struggling against the gate of Hades and aspects of the Kingdom will break out within the church from time to time to varying degrees, but the Kingdom per se is ever out of reach of the provisional church.\(^8\)

The church has no reason to exalt herself—because she is not the kingdom. She serves the reign of God as the anointed herald and witness. The church must not make herself central. Her task is to point to the coming kingdom. The church, in fact, is weak and provisional and weighed down with many cares.\(^9\)

Not only is the church provisional, but God’s salvation-mission activity in history is not entirely dependent upon the church either.

God’s interaction with the world is greater than the activity of the missionary church. . . .

God and his kingdom are much broader than that which the church undertakes with her mission.\(^10\)

The missionary Spirit of God is supernaturally active independent of the church, preparing peoples’ hearts to be responsive to the gospel before and outside their contact with the church. For example, in the Old Testament the Spirit spoke to Israel through prophets, though she continually dismissed and persecuted them. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit spoke to several people who were part of the old covenant to prepare them for the arrival and mission of Jesus (e.g. John, Mary, Elizabeth, and Simeon). In Acts 10, the Holy Spirit prepares Peter for his visit to Cornelius through a dream and also goes ahead of Peter in the form of an angelic visitation, to prepare Cornelius for Peter’s message of forgiveness


of sins for the Gentiles. “In all this it was the Spirit behind the scenes orchestrating the missionary proceedings.”

Further, the Kingdom is neither a geographical place nor a given people. McBrien, Tillapaugh, and Hurst have already in effect said this when they said the Kingdom exists whenever and wherever God’s will is being done. George Eldon Ladd would say the Kingdom of God exists whenever and wherever the reign of God is in effect:

The kingdom of God is His kingship, His rule, His authority. When we realize this, we can see this meaning in passage after passage in the New Testament. We can see that the Kingdom of God is not a realm, or a people, but it is God’s reign. Jesus said that we must “receive the Kingdom of God as little children” (Mark 10:15). What is received? The church? Heaven? What is received is God’s rule.

Lastly, Jesus’ exhortations to “receive” or “enter” the Kingdom and pray that God’s “kingdom come” and God’s “will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” tell us that humanity is currently located in a place and time where other fallen kingdoms and authorities are still in effect. While on earth, humans may or may not choose to enter or receive God’s Kingdom.

On earth, the Kingdom is both already present and at the same time, not yet fully present.

Jesus announces multiple times that the Kingdom is “near” (eggizo) and once uses the expression “inside [entos] you.” The Kingdom indwells but also transcends humanity. Ladd elaborates on the now/yet-to-come dynamic of the Kingdom Jesus ushers in:

What Jesus meant was this: “Yes, the Kingdom of God is here. But there is a mystery—a new revelation about the Kingdom. . . .

God’s Kingdom is to work among people in two different stages. The Kingdom is yet to come in the form prophesied by Daniel when every human sovereignty will be displaced by God’s sovereignty. The world will yet behold the coming of God’s Kingdom with power. But the mystery, the new revelation, is that this very Kingdom of God has now come to work among people, but in a utterly unexpected way. It is

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11 Ibid., 30.


13 Luke 17:21 NIV.
not now destroying human rule; it is not now abolishing every sin from the earth; it is not now bringing the baptism of fire John had announced. It has come quietly, secretly, without drawing attention to itself. It can work among men and never be recognized by the crowds. The Kingdom now offers the blessings of God’s rule, delivering people from the power of Satan and sin. The Kingdom of God is an offer, a gift that may be accepted or rejected. The Kingdom is now here with persuasion rather than with power.\textsuperscript{14}

In sum, God’s Kingdom is a spiritual sovereignty, now currently available to be received or entered by, though not imposed upon, all. The day is coming when God’s sovereignty will fully reign over all spiritual forces of evil and fallen human sovereignties, but presently, God’s reign is quietly breaking out on earth, even while it is only fully, exclusively operative in heaven. God’s Kingdom is now visible to humans wherever and whenever God’s “good, perfect and pleasing will” is being done.\textsuperscript{15} The church, made up of those who have already received or entered the Kingdom, is provisional, but also the primary, visible outpost of God’s Kingdom.

The comments thus far illustrate that Christ-followers themselves do not “build” or “extend” the Kingdom. Both the now and yet-to-come kingship of God is solely God’s. God alone is the king who is in power or in control. People can enter the Kingdom, Jesus’ most commonly used expression, or receive God’s kingship, but God’s reign is bigger than, beyond and external to, the humans who reside under and within that reign. Nevertheless, the church does have a role to play in relation to God’s nascent Kingdom.

\textsuperscript{14} Ladd, 86-7.

\textsuperscript{15} Rom. 12:2.
The Church’s Role in the Kingdom

In order to decipher the church’s role as a vehicle in relation to the Kingdom, we again turn to recent publications discussing practical applications gleaned from a biblical understanding of the Kingdom.

R. Paul Stevens argues we should speak of the church as “bringing in” the Kingdom. Note other verbs Stevens employs as well: “participate,” “embody,” “serve,” and “welcome.”

The church’s mission is not to ‘bring in’ the church, or even extend it. The church’s mission is to ‘bring in’ the kingdom. In this way the people of God participates in, embodies and serves what God is accomplishing by creation, salvation, sanctification and consummation. But the church does not circumscribe God’s work. The church is God’s primary agency in fulfilling his sending. But it also welcomes the irruption of the Kingdom of God everywhere. The church serves as a lighthouse, an outcropping of the Kingdom, a visible manifestation of God’s Kingdom on earth.¹⁶

N.T. Wright uses slightly different terminology, but with the same intent. Christ-followers do not build the Kingdom through their own human effort, rather, they “build for the kingdom.” He explains this subtle distinction as follows:

Let’s be quite clear on two points. First, God build’s God’s kingdom. But God ordered His world in such a way that His own work takes place through one of His creatures—the human beings who reflect his image. . . . Following the disaster of rebellion and corruption, he has built into the gospel message the fact that through the work of Jesus and the power of the Spirit, He equips humans to help in the work of getting the project back on track. . . .

Second, we must distinguish between the final kingdom and the present anticipation of it. The final coming together of heaven and earth is, of course, God’s supreme act of new creation for which the only real prototype—other than the first creation itself—was the resurrection of Jesus. God alone . . . will make the “new” heavens and the “new” earth. . . .

But what we can and must do in the present, is we are obedient to the gospel, if we are following Jesus, and if we are indwelt, energized and directed by the Spirit, is to build for the kingdom.¹⁷

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George Hunsberger also warns about the use of “extending” or “building” terminology. After a thorough survey of the multitude of ways the Kingdom is spoken about in the New Testament, he proposes his own variant terminology gleaned from predominate scriptural metaphors:

At the center of the message Jesus proclaimed was the announcement of the reign of God. This theme has been increasingly recovered in recent reflections on the evangelizing mission of the church. Still, as the phrase comes into the casual parlance of the church, it picks up untested assumptions about our relationship to God’s reign. On the one hand, the reign of God becomes something we “extend.” Especially among those evangelical agendas, we imagine ourselves as those responsible to spread or expand the reign of God. On the other hand, those more concerned with the social implications of the gospel tend to speak about “building” the reign of God. Mission then has to do with establishing or fashioning the reign of God on earth.

There are problems with both assumptions. In the case of the first (to extend), the reign of God is conceived to be all ‘in here’ and the church’s mission is to be its CEOs, its sales promoters to extend it out to include more and more people. In the case of the second assumption (to build), the reign of God becomes more a social project that we accomplish. It is conceived to be all “out there,” awaiting construction by its architects, contractors and carpenters.

It is noteworthy, however, that neither the expression “to extend” nor “to build” is ever used in the Bible to indicate the way we should see our responsibility regarding the reign of God. We find a parable about how the kingdom extends itself (Mark 4:30-32), but it is never said that we are to extend it. We find construction imagery having to do with the building of a congregation (1 Cor. 3:9-15), but the church is never equated to the reign of God, and we are never told to go out and build it.

What then, are appropriate verbs to use? In the Gospels, the most repeated and emphatic verbs directing our response to the reign of God are ‘to receive’ and ‘to enter.’

From these references, we garner a multitude of possible biblically informed expressions to use regarding the church’s (and likewise, the individual Christ-follower’s) role in relation to the Kingdom, including “bringing in,” “building for,” “participate,” “embody,” “serve,” “welcome,” “enter,” and “receive.” Some have more active connotations, which lend themselves to the role of agent. The last two, which Jesus used most frequently in the

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gospels,\textsuperscript{19} are more baffling because of their passive connotation. Newbigin’s comments about the Kingdom may provide a solution to the dilemma:

The coming of the Kingdom lies in the Father’s hands, on the other side of death and defeat. The earthly ministry of Jesus is not the launching of a movement that will gradually transform the world into the Kingdom of God. It is, rather, a showing forth, within the confines of the present age, of the reality which constitutes the age to come—the reality of God’s reign.\textsuperscript{20}

In fulfilling Jesus’ sending, the church was never meant to build or extend any “movement that will gradually transform the world into the kingdom of God.” Like Hunsberger, Wright and others have said that such a movement would make the Kingdom into a social project that humans could accomplish. Instead, the church is meant to show forth “within the confines of the present age . . . the reality of God’s reign.” Social justice and transformation is evidence of God’s reign but does not, as a human initiative, create God’s reign. Instead, God’s reign produces social transformation through His church.

“Showing forth,” in practical terms, means demonstrating, or making visible, what God’s reign looks like in a time and place where evil continues to sustain a reign of its own. Hunsberger is again instructive here:

Here is a portrait of our conversion and its ongoing nature. We are those who, having been offered God’s grace and God’s welcome, daily receive and enter into the reign of God. This means that evangelism is construed in terms of companionship. We walk alongside others to whom the same gift is extended and to whom God offers the same welcome. We invite them to join us in the joy of daily receiving and entering into the reign of God. . . . The posture of invitation and initiation into a shared lifestyle then displaces the image of conquest and dominance.\textsuperscript{21}

First, Christ-followers receive or enter the Kingdom and continue to do so in an ongoing way throughout their lives. As they continually, actively live according to God’s


\textsuperscript{21} Hunsberger, 138-9.
will, they are in a position to act as ambassadors and priests, mediating between God’s Kingdom and the world by inviting others into “the joy of daily receiving and entering into the reign of God.” Their embodiment, the exemplification and representation of God’s reign, shows the reality of the Kingdom. Christ-followers give God’s Kingdom tangible visible form for those who have yet to enter and receive God’s reign.

Kingdom Ministry

Kingdom ministry is the means by which God’s Kingdom can be felt and seen by those who have yet to enter or receive the Kingdom. Missiologist Ralph Winter’s definitions of church mission and Kingdom mission provide an ideal springboard for the term Kingdom ministry. Church mission is “winning people into the Church . . . [and] extending the membership of the church” while Kingdom mission is “the work of the church beyond itself, going beyond Church Mission to see that His will is done on earth outside the Church.”

Collectively, the body of Christ continues Jesus’ Kingdom mission by serving as Christ’s ministering body in the world. Kingdom ministry is getting God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven. Kingdom ministry takes Christ-followers far beyond getting God’s will done in their internal and personal life or among their brothers and sisters in Christ; it takes them into the world on a mission to make God’s reign visible and tangible out in the world. Howard Snyder defines Kingdom ministry succinctly as “any service carried out in the name of Jesus that serves people or nature and shows forth God’s rule in the world.”

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22 Winter, 264.

23 Snyder, 222.
Deeds of Ministry

Kingdom ministry is getting God’s will done outside the church, in the world. “Done” indicates deeds. As stated in the previous Limiters section, spoken words and ministry deeds are inseparable when it comes to showing forth the Kingdom. In the past century, however, “social action” fell under suspicion in the evangelical church, and thus it has tended to emphasize words while neglecting deeds. It should have been the other way around. The church is overdue for a recovered emphasis on “demonstration” of the Kingdom to complement its proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom.

Jesus’ response to some antagonistic Jewish leaders in John 10:36b-38 is instructive: “Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.” In effect, Jesus says, “Don’t believe me if my deeds are inconsistent with my words. But, even if my words are unbelievable, believe the deeds so that you can understand who I am and that I’m telling the truth.” Mark Twain put Jesus’ words another way: “Action speaks louder than words.” While actions cannot speak conclusively of Jesus without words, actions speak louder than words, and actions must visibly accompany words to an unbelieving audience.

Jesus demonstrates that at times deeds have the potential to get the message across when words do not. But he never says the inverse, “If my actions don’t point toward God, then just believe what I say.” Indeed, we would equate that with the hypocrite’s adage “Do what I say but not what I do.”

24 Winter, 265.

James 1:27 speaks to the link between words and deeds, as well as 1 Pet. 3:15-16:

“But in your hearts, revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” Hunsberger says this of the same passage:

The assumption of such a passage is that the presence of such a hope is an observable thing, demonstrable to public view by the community that embodies the gospel. . . . demonstrating the gospel in life is not merely for the sake of keeping the way clear for a hearing of the gospel. The demonstration itself shows what the gospel is about. The congregation is the “hermeneutic of the gospel,” the only lens through which people see and interpret what the gospel is about and how it may be embraced. 26

Jesus’ Deeds of Ministry

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21b) is the briefest of all Jesus’ commissioning statements. A few chapters earlier, in Jesus’ longest recorded, high priestly prayer, Jesus says to the Father, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). Rather than analyzing Jesus’ lengthier post-ascension commissioning statements to his disciples found in the synoptics (Matt, 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:44-47), for this discussion we will be guided by the conjunctive “as” found in the two verses in John. This draws our attention to what Jesus did during his own ministry.

As familiar as the word “ministry” is, the English word, translated from the biblical languages, occurs only a handful of times in the Bible. For example, in the NRSV, it occurs a total of sixteen times, including twice in the Old Testament and fourteen times in the New

26 Hunsberger, 141-2.
In the New Testament occurrences, it is most frequently translated from the Greek word, *diakonia*, which, in its general sense, simply means “service” and more specifically, of a menial kind as a servant’s role of waiting upon and attending to the needs of a master. The noun “minister” and verbal forms of “to minister” are more numerous, but they have primarily been translated from Hebrew and Greek words that embody the same sense of menial service such as meaning “temple servant,” “waiter,” “attendant,” “subordinate.”

The word “ministry,” like Kingdom, has become clouded in meaning from its original biblical sense as it evolved in usage. Trained in classical languages, Martin Smith speaks to the word ministry’s original roots:

I am thinking about “diakonia” the Greek word for ministry. “Konis” means dust and grit. The original image behind Christian service and ministry is activity that takes you through the dust. . . . Ministry refers to something close to the ground, a continuous journey through the grit and grime of the everyday. The word contradicts everything grandiose, lofty or even sublime. Ministry is quite literally dirty work. Ministry always deals with the nitty-gritty of real human needs and struggles.

If the Greek word emphasizes the “gritty” aspect of ministry, the Latin emphasizes the “nitty.” . . . [O]ur word ministry comes from the Latin root for small things, as the in the word miniscule. . . . A minister is a person involved in little matters, small affairs. A magister is responsible for big affairs and large issues.

The biblical sense of ministry then is exactly what Smith has identified: 1) Ministry is dirty, messy work that locates the minister precisely in face-to-face contact with real human needs and struggles, and 2) ministry is the humble, menial work of “small things”—types of service that, in today’s well-oiled church machine, might be perceived as insignificant, inconvenient, distracting to the vision, and/or disruptive to carefully planned programmatic operations.

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27 Evans, 59.

In whatever way we have come to conceptualize ministry today, Jesus’ own ministry comprised of nitty-gritty, one-on-one, deeds of compassion to types of people that would seldom set foot inside many American institutionalized churches—the hungry, homeless, blind, crippled, ill, paralyzed, and demon-possessed. If contemporary Christ-followers want to participate in Jesus’ ministry rather than simply do church work, they must begin by revisiting how Jesus essentially understood his own ministry and how he would have his disciples essentially understand theirs.

Luke 4:14-21 records what motivated Jesus’ ministry. Jesus’ inaugural teaching in his hometown is an announcement of the objective of his ministry. In his recitation of Isa. 61:1-2, Jesus stuns his listeners by announcing he has been anointed by the Spirit to fulfill the ministry of the Messiah: “It was in essence Jesus’ mission statement, and it laid out the great promises of God to those who receive the Messiah and His coming kingdom.”

Richard Stearns identifies three components of Jesus’ Kingdom ministry out of this seminal announcement:

1. The *proclamation of the good news* of salvation (“to preach good news to the poor”)
2. *Compassion for the sick and the sorrowful* (“recovery of sight to the blind”)
3. A *commitment to justice* (“proclaim freedom for the prisoners,” “to release the oppressed,” “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” [the Old Testament year of Jubilee, God’s way of leveling the ground between rich and poor]).

Jesus’ ministry is a holistic combination of preaching, healing, and securing justice for the oppressed, addressing both spiritual and physical needs.

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29 Stearns, 21.

30 Ibid., 21-2.
The preaching and healing ministry continues to show up elsewhere in the gospels. In Matt. 4:23, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and disease among the people.” In Matt. 9:35-36, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them . . .”

Furthermore, he gives his disciples power to do the same. In Matt. 10:1, “He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” Luke 9:1-2 similarly tells us, “When Jesus had called the twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out demons and cure diseases, and he sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” Lest we think these commissions were reserved for the twelve, in Luke 10:9, he sends out a larger group of seventy-two with the same commission: “Heal the sick who are there and tell them ‘the kingdom of God is near you.’” Preaching and healing, words and deeds, function together to convey the total good news of the Kingdom. Jesus’ type of ministry deeds, in particular, make the Kingdom visible and tangible.

As noted, the Greek word predominately used for ministry in the New Testament is diakonia, but there is a second Greek word with nuances of ministry, therapeuein, used in the above-mentioned verses, from which our English word “therapy” is derived:

In the gospels, while therapeuein usually means “to heal” or “cure” . . . nuances of ‘service’ or ‘ministry’ are also present in its usage. Thus, it needs to be recognized that such healings would have been interpreted by Jesus’ contemporaries as significant acts of ministry—that is, service rendered by Jesus to those who suffered various physical afflictions.31

31 Evans, 61.
Jesus’ ministry deeds are predominately “therapeutic” to people arousing his compassion. Matt. 9:37-38 has classically been used to exhort Christians to enter the harvest field and evangelize (verbal proclamation): “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” The immediately preceding verses 35 and 36 are mentioned less often: “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Herein lies the practical information regarding the harvest: Jesus’ healing goes hand in hand with preaching, and he is motivated by compassion for “harassed and helpless” people in particular.

Of all Jesus’ miracles recorded in the gospels (including healing, command over the forces of nature, and raising people from the dead), twenty-four out of thirty-three are healings, and five out of the remaining nine have to do with the provision of large amounts of food or drink. Healing, in the broadest sense, means to restore something that is broken to wholeness. This is Jesus’ work in order to fulfill God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven. This is Jesus Kingdom ministry amongst the “harassed and helpless.” Jesus says in Matt. 9:12-13, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Since “healing ministry” connotes exclusively spectacular, dramatic physical healing for some, Logan and Short’s term compassion ministry is preferable: “Compassion is therefore a mind and heart response of openness to God’s leading, which arises from a

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32 Chart of Miracles of Jesus, Kenneth Barker, ed., The NIV Study Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 1596.
personal observation of human need, physical and/or spiritual; and that leads to specific action taken to meet that need.”33 The specific action in this definition equates to the ministry deeds we have been discussing above. Compassion ministry is the practical vehicle for Kingdom ministry. Christ-followers will participate in God’s will being done on earth, as it is heaven, through compassion ministry. Collectively, the body of Christ will be Christ’s ministering body in the world, making Christ's compassion visible and tangible to the world.

The Recipients of Jesus’ Ministry

One final issue to consider is who, predominantly, are the recipients of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus certainly came to save all sinners, but throughout the Bible God appears to have special interest in the “harassed and helpless” mentioned in the Matt. 9 passage above. There is ongoing debate over whether God is in fact partial to poor people over rich people. Karl Barth boldly says yes: “God in no wise [sic] takes up a neutral position between the poor person and the rich person. The rich may take care of their own future; He is on the side of the poor. . . . Thus the Bible is on the side of the poor and destitute. He who the Bible calls God is on the side of the poor.”34

Mortimer Arias has done a detailed study of Jesus preferential attention to the poor in Matthew’s gospel:

All people, all nations are the addressees of mission and evangelism. But in the gospel of Matthew there is a strong emphasis upon a particular sector of addressees: “the little ones.” Who are they? They are “the poor in spirit” to whom the kingdom belongs (5:3) and the sheer poor to whom the kingdom is announced (11:5, 19:21). They are also the children, to whom also the Kingdom belongs (19:14-15); they are the most important in the Kingdom (18:2), and the mediators of Christ’s presence

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(18:3-5). “Little ones” are also the “simple,” adults called “little children,” to whom is revealed what is hidden from the wise (11:25). They are also the “babes,” who acclaim the Messiah in the Temple (21:14-15), and the “weary and overburdened,” who are the privileged recipients of Jesus’ tenderness (11:28). They are also the “little ones” in the churches, greater than John the Baptist in the Kingdom (11:11), and about whom Jesus made one of his most severe warnings (18:6, 10, 14). Even “a glass of cold water” given to them counts before God (10:42). Finally, the “least of these” are the deprived and needy, the forgotten and neglected, who are the entourage of the Son of Man at the judgment seat, the “brothers” and “sisters” of Jesus (25:40, 45). All of these “little ones” are the priority and privileged addressees of discipleship mission.35

It does appear that the “harassed and helpless” are in the forefront as recipients of Jesus’ compassion and his physical and spiritual therapy. Revelation 20:4 tells us that in the yet-to-come new heaven and new earth, where God’s reign is absolute, there will be no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain. There will be no more suffering of any kind. In announcing “the kingdom is near,” Jesus’ arrival and earthly ministry fundamentally marks the beginning of the end of spiritual and physical suffering of all kinds. Howard Snyder affirms that Kingdom ministry “is especially seen in care for the poor, the oppressed, the dispossessed, refugees and aliens, all those who suffer, and in general those with no social power.”36

Conclusion

As noted earlier, the Church’s assignment is not to create heaven on earth. That is impossible while the Church must work within the confines of this present age and struggle “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). However, this does not excuse the Church to adopt a posture of resignation or inaction. Following Jesus into Kingdom


36 Snyder, 222.
ministry means the Church must strive to get God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven, to continue Jesus’ mission to eradicate suffering within the confines of the present not-yet form of the Kingdom, as Jesus did during his earthly ministry. By doing this, Christ-followers show forth, “within the confines of the present age…the reality of God’s reign.”

Following Jesus will take contemporary Christ-followers into compassion ministry among the “harassed and helpless” in their everyday world. Contemporary Christ-followers will act as priests and ambassadors, inviting all people, in Jesus’ name, to “receive” God as their King and “enter” God’s Kingdom.

Thus, the thesis: The church must mobilize Christ-followers outward for Kingdom ministry—service in Jesus’ name and the Spirit’s power—in the world they encounter every day.

Kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church change the world.

The next section will examine how ministry, as described here, was reduced to mean select services to select people in a select dedicated building by a select group of professionals.

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37 Newbigin, 99.

38 Ibid., 11.
Chapter 5
Church in the New Testament

Introduction

Jesus and his earliest followers did not carry out ministry inside church walls. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify where the first century Christians actually gathered for worship and where they ministered to those in need. Those in need included persons within their membership and persons in their everyday world. A deeper analysis of first century hospitality and Jesus’ redefinition of hospitality and family will shed new light on the attractive nature of the first century church. It will also challenge today’s church to function more interdependently as family and to minister more tangibly and sacrificially to nearby neighbors who cannot repay.

Chapter four established how Jesus’ entire ministry fell “under the bright gaze of the kingdom,” to quote Derek Christensen.

It has always puzzled me that Jesus spoke so much of the Kingdom and his followers speak so much of the Church. When all our talk is of the church, then that which lies outside of the church in a programmed sense tends to fade into obscurity. But when we talk of the Kingdom, that can’t happen because everything falls under the bright gaze of the Kingdom.39

During Jesus’ lifetime, and continuing through the apostle Paul’s lifetime, the church was not a large, well-oiled institution—and certainly not a building—but an organic gathering of believers, who met in private domestic spaces without a professional leader.

Two Monumental Developments in the Early Church

Within two centuries of Jesus’ ascension, two monumental developments reduced ministry to denote select services, performed by a select group of people, for a select group of people often inside the walls of a select building. One of these developments was the movement from house church to dedicated building. A second development, simultaneous with this movement, and practically necessitated by it, was the emergence of two different groups of Christ-followers: a majority group who became largely spectators of ministry, and a much smaller group who came to be seen as those who do ministry. This basic form of institutionalized church (meeting in a dedicated building, served by professional ministers) has prevailed, unmodified in any significant way, since about AD 300.

As a result of these two developments, church ministry eclipsed Kingdom ministry. “Church” became a building people spoke of going to, and “ministry” became the profession of small, elite class called clergy. Granted, throughout church history, there have always been small, organized movements that have reacted to the formalizing and clericalizing of the church, but they have never overtaken the institutionalized church. Even the Reformation emphasis on the “priesthood of all believers,” did not substantially alter the institutionalized church’s form.

In the contemporary Western vernacular, “church” usually refers to a building, the workplace of the professional minister(s) during the week, and the worship center for the congregants once a week on the weekend. In contrast, as Bishop John A. T. Robinson says,

When there is no church to go to, one can only be the church. At this level there is a new constraint both towards mission and towards deeper involvement with one’s neighbour in Christ. One cannot ignore either the house next door (there is no real “next door” to the parish church) or the Christian next to one (the parlor is very different than the pew).  

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It is not the intent of this dissertation to revisit the earliest church with a “primitivist” or “restorationist” motive or to advocate the elimination of buildings and clergy. Rather, the intent is to look back at the infant church, when there were no professional ministers and when Christians typically worshipped in private domestic spaces, to discover what about church life at that time might have been conducive to Kingdom ministry. We will now consider the New Testament house church and its evolution into the dedicated building with professional clergy, which has led to Christ’s followers speaking “so much of the Church.”

Where the First Century Christians Met

The early Christians are commonly envisioned using the temple and Jewish synagogues as gathering places for worship (e.g. the “Acts 2 church,” which daily “continued to meet together in the temple courts . . . broke bread in their homes . . . and the Lord added to their number daily”). Yet, as Henry Chadwick states, initial Jewish and Christian solidarity was fleeting and several sources for contempt surfaced.

On the one hand Christianity offered no encouragement to the nationalistic Zealots, awaiting for the hour of revolt against Rome; on the other hand, it was far too revolutionary for the Jewish ‘Establishment’, which pursued a compromising policy of political collaboration and religious conservatism. Above all, there was the delicate problem of Christian attitude toward the Gentiles.42

The apostle Paul’s achievement of freedom and equal status for Gentile Christians and their recognition as Christians by the Jerusalem church (Acts 15) was the beginning of the end when it came to Christians and Jews assembling under the same roof. These issues, along

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with uniquely Christian worship practices, including the central rite of the Eucharist, made Christian worship in a synagogue intolerable to the Jews. They were forced to meet elsewhere for Christian worship and thus began “the shift of the community from the Temple and its purity system to the household and its domestic sphere as the new locus of the Spirit’s action”\textsuperscript{43} It is estimated that somewhere between AD 90-100 Jewish Christians had been completely evicted from synagogue services.\textsuperscript{44} Vincent Branick explains:

\begin{quote}
As with most “foreign cults” in their earliest stages of expansion, the Christian meeting in private homes was probably a practical necessity. For the Christians the synagogues quickly became off limits. The pagan temples involved too many unsavory associations. And the stately basilicas were centuries away. The private home on the other hand afforded a place of privacy, intimacy and stability for the early Christians.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

So, on one hand, early Christianity was a small, unpopular religious sect, circumstantially forced to gather in domestic spaces for meetings. The lukewarm or fainthearted would think twice before risking affiliation with such a group. On the other hand, membership in this new sect came with substantial benefits.

\textit{First Century Domestic Spaces}

There is considerable interest in the physical characteristics of the typical first century house that would have hosted a house church. Contemporary house church and small group proponents, who wish to argue the value of smaller communities, have tended to focus on one type of house, the atrium house.


\textsuperscript{45} Vincent P. Branick, \textit{The House Church in the Writings of Paul} (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1989), 14.
Atrium houses were owned by approximately one to three percent of the wealthiest in society at that time.\textsuperscript{46} For example, Robert Banks claims this type of house 

. . . puts a limit on the numbers involved. The entertaining room in a moderately well-to-do household could hold around thirty people comfortably—perhaps half as many again in an emergency. . . . if the meeting spilled over into the atrium then the number could have been greater, though no more than double the size . . . The average membership was around thirty to thirty five people.\textsuperscript{47}

With this specific type of house in mind, the secret to the explosive church growth seen in Acts 2 and every member involvement is construed as relatively small groups (ranging from 30-50) meeting in homes.

Balch, Osiek, and others, however, have discovered there was more than a single type of domestic structure that housed Christian worship gatherings and that the number of Christians gathering for worship might have been much larger than originally thought. Beside atrium homes, Christians also assembled for worship in \textit{insulae}—large multi-storied tenements which included apartments, shops and industries\textsuperscript{48}—and in the palatial mansions of the super-rich (one-tenth of one percent of the population).\textsuperscript{49} The latter might have been able to accommodate very large numbers, ranging from 360-1135 depending on the home.\textsuperscript{50}

Carolyn Osiek maintains,

It is unwise to set a hard upper limit of 30 to 40 for the number of Christians who might celebrate the Lord’s Supper in a Roman triclinium plus peristyle or in open gardens. Christian assemblies were certainly much smaller than 40; others could have been significantly larger. . . . The need for all early Christian assemblies to be small


\textsuperscript{48} Balch, 34.

\textsuperscript{49} Branick, 42.

and private is a modern projection, not justified by Roman domestic culture or architecture.\textsuperscript{51}

Because of the apparent variety in house church venues, we will abstain from making applications from the standpoint of size and numbers and instead consider two other unique aspects of New Testament domestic spaces that may have been conducive to Kingdom ministry.

One such aspect, whether we have in mind a \textit{domus} or \textit{insula}, is the ancient distinction between public and private space:

The house was one of the most important places for doing business and for the production of salable goods. The house was not the place to escape from work but the place where much of the work was done; it was not the place to be free of a public role, but a place to enhance that role by hospitality. The modern idea of the sacred privacy of the home does not apply.\textsuperscript{52}

Balch similarly reports that the doors of Roman houses in the New Testament era . . . were open for \textit{uninvited} visitors. Romans’ differentiation of public from private space was very different from modern, Western values . . . In the modern West, we divide our ‘private’ living spaces from ‘public’ work areas, but Romans did not. Houses along busy streets incorporated shops that invited customers into the \textit{domus}; the lack of privacy would make modern, Western persons paranoid.\textsuperscript{53}

Michele George provides an example of how far this lack of privacy extended: “To a degree we find incomprehensible, Romans would ignore the presence of slaves even in the most private of circumstances such as sexual intimacy.”\textsuperscript{54}

The lack of compartmentalization of daily activities (work, leisure, family life) and almost nonexistent privacy makes it difficult to determine what activities occur “inside” and

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 203.


\textsuperscript{53} Balch, 29.

“outside,” and what activities are public and private, in New Testament domestic dwellings. Given the high degree of social permeability resulting from the multi-purpose usage of these dwellings, persons associated in any way with the ancient house church would experience both a quality and quantity of social contact in this context that would be drastically altered once Christians moved their activities into dedicated buildings.

Despite the discomfort this seemingly boundary-less ancient lifestyle might cause a modern Westerner, what is significant here is the extraordinary number of natural intersections members of the ancient house church would have with their workday world. Commerce and/or employment, Christian worship, family life, eating, sleeping, etc., all took place in the same structure with an “open door policy” that invited constant traffic from the community. Opportunities for Kingdom ministry—getting God’s will done outside the church—are inherent 24/7 in the first century house church, where there is no real inside or outside.

Furthermore, there was considerable interaction between the social classes in New Testament domestic spaces. Balch, citing Andrew Wallace-Hadrill’s work, reports “that rich and poor, master and slave coexisted in mixed ‘neighborhoods’ of domus and insulae.” Wallace-Hadrill elaborates:

Massive social contrasts are apparent, in the gulf between the most magnificent mansions and the humblest tabernae or cenacula. Yet the gulf is constantly bridged by contiguity and mutual dependence. We have seen not so much a gulf between “rich families” and “poor families,” but the promiscuity of the big household, in which rich and poor, and indeed male and female, young and old, inhabit the same spaces, separated by social ritual rather than physical environment.

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55 Balch, 37.

Certainly, the modern Church does not want to reinstitute injustices, such as slavery, or return to ancient social rituals and hierarchies in order to emulate the New Testament situation. On the other hand, the majority of today’s American churches, which often meet in dedicated buildings in suburban settings, are exceedingly spatially, racially, and socially segregated compared to the New Testament house churches. Tillapaugh and Hurst observe,

In the fifties, the heyday of American suburbia, the church was a necessary part of the suburban landscape. In fact, early suburban developers often gave lots to churches. Suburban churches became part of the American Dream. . . . Cynics contend that the primary role for the suburban church in America today is to function as “religious parks and recreation” for the middle class.\(^5\)

The suburban parks-and-recreation type church facility bears little resemblance to New Testament domestic spaces in its usage.

The fact that New Testament domestic spaces housed virtually all of people’s life activities, the very public nature of private domestic spaces and the constant, normal intersection of social classes in these spaces are all facets that made New Testament house churches especially conducive to Kingdom ministry. When a contemporary church evaluates the efficacy of its meeting space for Kingdom ministry, it must explore creative ways to foster the intersections of social class inherent in the ancient house church.

*New Testament Householders and Hospitality*

A second aspect of ancient domestic spaces relevant to Kingdom ministry has to do with the ancient Mediterranean virtue and practice of hospitality and the additional dimension Jesus commands of his followers.

Even without modern transportation vehicles, the Roman Empire enjoyed comparative ease of travel in its day; travel was relatively affordable, and a normal part of

\(^5\) Tillapaugh and Hurst, 49-50.
life for merchants and artisans. Roman society provided for the lodging and entertainment of travelers through inns, though these were generally viewed as “last resort” options and avoided by the upper classes. Private hospitality was preferred and considered most virtuous of the host, whether they were pagan, Jew, or Christian.

Among Jesus’ followers, Destro and Pesce supply an important distinction between mobile “itinerant” disciples and stationary “sympathetic disciples.” Jesus’ movement is based on some members leaving households and the rest of the members providing hospitality; a Christ-follower either had one role or the other:

Jesus and his movement need the household structure because they have to find somewhere to lodge (and they do not normally make use of inns). Luke’s Jesus programmatically declares that the twelve have to make use of hospitality in the houses of others . . .

Jesus’ movement thus utilizes the system of the houses. . . . [it] offers Jesus’ movement the required support structure through its hospitality.

In his preaching, Jesus asks individuals, not whole households to follow him. In many cases, this would create a conflict between the individual and the household losing that member, because of the function the member fulfilled within the household. Once disciples left their household to follow Jesus, they were homeless and had to rely on the hospitality of other Christian householders for food and shelter on their missionary journeys. Trusting in and availing themselves of the provision of this hospitality was Jesus’ challenge to his itinerant disciples.

Jesus did not ask all his followers to leave or sell their houses, but he challenged those who remained householders with three responsibilities of their own. First, they were obligated to practice hospitality to itinerant disciples. For example, Jesus announced to

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59 Ibid., 65-6.

60 Moxnes, 226-7.

Second, they were to practice this hospitality to those unable to enter into a reciprocal exchange of hospitality, which was a break from the assumed cultural mechanism of exchange in the practice of hospitality. According to the mechanism of exchange, the householder would decide whether or not to grant a request for hospitality based on whether the householder expected the hospitality could be reciprocated. There was social compensation involved and this system excluded “all the social classes that are not able to enter into a reciprocal exchange: those who are not house-owners, the destitute, and those that have no proper income.”

Third, householders were to further ignore this cultural mechanism of exchange and practice justice by offering hospitality to the marginalized in society in general, “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:13).

While the practice of hospitality was culturally virtuous, the dimension of non-reciprocity Jesus added was decidedly counter-cultural. Jesus redefines hospitality to be something far beyond lavish “entertaining” of friends, relatives, and rich neighbors, which in the end exalts and rewards the host (Luke 14:12). Christ-followers who retain their homes have weighty new responsibilities that, when fulfilled, serve as a radical witness of God’s Kingdom within the surrounding culture. Destro and Pesce say in sum,

The double challenge to the itinerant followers and the householders differentiates the kind of participation of individuals to the Jesus movement, and put all of them in a close interrelation within which the model of discipleship tends to transform the model of the household.

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61 Ibid., 232.
63 Ibid., 234.
In this brief study of New Testament hospitality, we see that Jesus has transformed the roles and responsibilities of the household members both toward one another and those outside the household. Jesus’ hospitality requires an “open door policy” toward fellow disciples and has a further social justice component of extending hospitality to those that cannot repay. The relevance for Kingdom ministry today parallels that of the previous section: hospitality on Jesus’ terms creates interdependence between itinerant and homeowners Christ-followers, and also welcomes the needy outside the fellowship of believers.

Again, the usage of New Testament domestic spaces for hospitality stands in stark contrast to that of today’s dedicated church buildings, which are typically available for use only by church members who pay for the church building through their giving of tithes and offerings. Usually, non-members must rent space to use it, and space is not usually available to those who cannot repay. Charging rent is justified because of the cost of owning and maintaining the building to the members. In the end, this is an exclusive economy, not the generous, compassionate Kingdom economy Jesus envisions.

“Family” in the New Testament House Church

A final element of the transformation Jesus brought to New Testament household dynamics centered around his redefinition of “family”:

After Jesus’ death, the followers who regathered and regrouped assembled in households. As they moved within and beyond Palestine, it was such households and families that served as the focus, basis and locus of mission. In accord with the familial focus of Jesus’ teaching, they continued to conceive of themselves as constituting a new surrogate “family/household of God” and described their social relations and responsibilities in familial terms.64

64 Ibid., 177.
In order to appreciate the radical significance of Jesus’ teaching on family, we will first review the secular meaning of family in New Testament times. Osiek explains the scope of who was included in families:

What did “family” mean to the inhabitants of the Mediterranean shores in the imperial period? Historians agree that whatever the term meant, it did not mean what it means to most modern Westerners. . . .

. . . the nuclear family. Though the nuclear family certainly existed, it does not seem to have functioned as a social unit in isolation, and therefore, it had no nomenclature. . . .

Households and family units included children, slaves, unmarried relatives, and often freedmen and freedwomen or other renters of shops or residential property. The easy access between commercial and domestic space in the surviving archeological material attests to this, as does the literary evidence.65

Malherbe explains the quality of relationships between family members:

. . . [I]n New Testament times the household was regarded as a basic political unit. . . . The household members’ loyalty to the interests of the household was so strong that it could rival loyalty to the republic. The closeness of the household unit offered the security and sense of belonging not provided by larger political and social structures. The head of the household had a degree of responsibility for his charges, but the solidarity of the group was based more on economic, and especially psychological, social and religious factors.66

In the New Testament era, “family” was synonymous with household, which included a mixture of biological relations and non-biological affiliates that were bound together according to socially accepted positions and responsibilities. Household members’ roles were determined by both hierarchical and patriarchal structures at the time. The head of the household was usually male (the paterfamilias) and was the overseer of the household unit. The intense loyalty within the household was born out of the mutually beneficial functions held among the adult members.

66 Malherbe, 69.
A second cultural dynamic crucial to understanding Jesus’ redefinition of family is this: “Brother and sister also retain extremely close relationships, and a brother is often considered the first-line protection of a sister’s interests, even after marriage.” Bartchy elaborates on this and cautions that one can only understand the early Christian community in depth if one acquaints oneself with the social roles and values of the first-century Roman world:

This sense of solidarity among siblings stood in sharp contrast to the sense of competition that prevailed once a person stepped over the family threshold. In the patriarchal world of Jesus, Paul and Luke, both boys and girls were socialized to expect not only that men would routinely dominate women, but also that every male should seek to dominate as many other men as possible. Within all social classes, traditional male socialization produced human beings trained to pursue a never-ending quest for great honor and influence in a culture where both honor and influence were in limited supply. . . .

Inside the family however, these values were inverted. Brothers were raised to give honor freely to all their siblings— . . . and to refrain from responding in kind to any honor challenge from a member of one’s own family. . . . This is in striking contrast to the family values of modern Western culture, where such loyalty and affection are experienced in the emotional bonds of marriage.

With this background, we can now understand the radical nature of Jesus’ new dictum:

“‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’” Jesus’ use of family terminology challenged believers—even though biologically unrelated—to look upon and treat each other as biological siblings, otherwise known as fictive kinship. Jesus’ family, and therefore his followers’ family, includes “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven.”

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The ramifications of Jesus’ statements for his followers’ relationships, and their responsibilities therein, were nothing short of revolutionary. Jesus asks all his followers to apply the honor, loyalty, and affection normally reserved for biological siblings, toward anyone who does his Father’s will. Giving precedence to ties in one’s religious community over natural family ties was absolutely unheard of. Moreover, “[t]o disavow literal family members was so repulsive that even using the image would have been culturally offensive.”

According to Bartchy, for Christ-followers to treat one another like family would bring the following to bear in their relationships:

1. **Loyalty and trust.** Loyalty was traditionally only given to blood relatives and all others were regarded as dishonorable until proven otherwise; Christ-followers were called to trust anyone who claimed Christ as lord.

2. **Truth telling.** While biological family members were highly obligated to tell the truth within the family, there was no such obligation to outsiders. Jesus taught his followers to tell the truth regardless of blood ties.

3. **Open homes to all within the extended kin group.** Meals were shared and hospitality extended to brothers and sisters in Christ, beyond the immediate household and business guests of the *paterfamilias*.

4. **Obligation to be sure that the needs of everyone in the group are met.** Blood relatives provide assistance to other blood relatives without regard for their ability to return the favor. Likewise, wealthy patrons householders shared their homes for Christian gatherings and shared their wealth with individual members as established in the last chapter.

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5. *A sense of shared destiny.* Ancient blood families embodied a shared sense of destiny; Christian brothers and sisters were inspired and energized by their shared sense of purpose and destiny as well.\(^{71}\)

This study brings the benefits of being family-in-Christ into sharp focus. Jesus transformed the meaning of family so that Christ-following “brothers and sisters” were challenged to have the same loyalty, affect, and responsibility for each other that blood relations did in secular culture. Whether the house church assembled in the *domus* or *insula*, it would offer a depth of community and demand a depth of commitment that resulted in a powerful interdependence amongst Jesus’ family members.

The local house church or apartment church provided, among other things, a sense of communal life and individual commitment . . . Its communal life must have been less attractive to those of large Christian households, and more attractive to those without large families, those who were members without their families, and the poorer members who lacked other means of social incorporation in a wider context. The appeal to the sense of extended family that the church provided must have been approved and fostered especially by members of these kinds. \(^{72}\)

In the days immediately following Pentecost, we are told, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need”\(^{73}\) and “no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. . . . there were no needy persons among them.”\(^{74}\)

In New Testament times, not unlike today, wealth was concentrated amongst a small minority of the total population. A major difference, however, is that there was no “middle class” as we know it. Osiek and Balch point out, “there was in this preindustrial agrarian

\(^{71}\) Bartch, 94-5.


\(^{73}\) Acts 2:44-45.

\(^{74}\) Acts 4:32-34.
society no middle class: an economically independent majority class of moderate to leisured economic levels, whose social status follows from economic status.”

Even while some variety in economic status certainly existed, scholars agree that the vast majority of people must have lived in biting poverty by any standards. In such a socioeconomic context, open surrogate family communities wherein “there were no needy persons” would be very attractive.

Osiek’s categories of “those without large families, those who were members without their families, and the poorer members” may well have been the primary demographic contributing to the explosive growth of the earliest church recorded in Acts 2:41 and 47. The benefits that came with being in Jesus’ family in the context of ancient socio-economic structures would have contributed significantly to the magnetism of early Christianity.

The Kingdom ministry application emerging from this study of Jesus’ family is that Christ-followers are to extend the same devotion and active care, even financial support, toward fellow Christ-followers that they normally reserve for next of kin. This presents a formidable challenge to the American church. In American free market culture, this level of interdependence is perceived negatively by most as unreasonable, unhealthy, or both.

Insurance policies, for example, typically define “dependents” as spouse and children under 18, or sometimes 25, if they are full-time students. This is our cultural definition of dependent. One is not considered to have any other dependents for whom one is responsible or obligated to meet the needs of beyond one’s own nuclear family. Further, one’s own children are only dependents until adulthood, regardless if they are married or single. Today, most consider assisting extended family (parents, siblings, etc.) to be financially extraordinary and optional. Government programs are in place for the disabled that the able

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fund through taxation. Once an able adult, one is expected to provide for themselves to the grave, period. This is vastly different to the New Testament world wherein an adult male’s “dependents” potentially included his spouse, unmarried children of any age, widowed mothers and sisters, and mother and father in their old age, including giving them a proper burial.\footnote{Ibid., 166.}

The earliest church attempted to serve its members like “a kind of welfare state in which, from birth to grave, all essential needs are taken care of, education, marriage, pastoral care, relief from hunger, health care and burial.”\footnote{Osiek, ”The Family in Early Christianity: 'Family Values' Revisited,” 24.} In the first century house church structure, with members assuming family roles in respect to one another, responsibilities were concrete, and it was actually possible to have no needy persons in the group.

At best, this welfare endeavor of the ancient house church will strike the contemporary Church as other-worldly and impossibly idealistic; at worst, as outrageous and undesirable. Yet today’s Church must allow itself to be confronted with the implications behind Jesus’ redefinition of family and evaluate how it actively cares for family-in-Christ, and particularly how welcoming and supportive it is toward those who cannot repay. This is the essence of Kingdom ministry.

Some churches make a start by keeping a supply of groceries in a food pantry, small vouchers from local merchants, and offer limited financial assistance from a deacon’s fund (a designated fund for practical/material needs) on a case by case basis. At best, these are temporary band-aids, but these steps are preferable to complete inaction. Churches could go further by challenging themselves to set aside of tithe of their income to respond to a combination of members’ needs and needs that emerge in the neighborhood in which the
church is situated—to assist both church family and also needy and marginalized neighbors outside the church, as Jesus challenged his followers to do. As Richard Stearns has noted, on average, churches give about two percent total for any kind of global missions, including evangelistic or meeting the needs of the poor. Most church’s funds for local needs reflect this same disproportionately small amount of a church’s total assets. Beyond financial resources, some churches have expanded their concept of hospitality from providing coffee and refreshments after worship, to offering programs that provide education, mental and physical health care, vocational training, and other similar programs that empower people long-term. Some churches have also additionally offered their buildings to house those programs in.

Conclusion

These brief studies of house church dwellings, hospitality, household, and family in New Testament times illustrate the radical interdependency and commitment among the earliest Christ-followers and explain the attractiveness of their community due to the very practical provisions and protections that participating members would enjoy. Because of the way Jesus redefined family, New Testament house churches united all strata of society in mutual service to one another and made sure no one was needy among them.

Jesus never meant for church (*ekklesia*) to refer to a building. *Ekklesia* refers to an assembly or gathering. When the earliest Christ-followers got evicted from the temple, they were not told to go and build another temple of their own; instead they were told they *are* the temple.\(^{78}\) The new temple is the collective body of Christ indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

\(^{78}\) 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5.
A more radical reinterpretation of the traditional temple concept is difficult to imagine. God’s “dwelling” upon on earth is a people rather than a building, a holy people “set apart” for God rather than from the world, a people mandated to mission rather than coddled in seclusion, a people called by God to the living of salvation in the matrix of everyday life rather than delivered from life’s cares and responsibilities, a people who live “before God” at all times and in all places rather than lead double lives in segregated sacred and secular compartments. Ministry in such a temple-community can only be worldward in its thrust.\(^7^9\)

The uncompartmentalized living quarters and lifestyle of New Testament–era Christ-followers made for house churches that were intrinsically “worldward.” Through their practice of open door, nonreciprocal hospitality, and interdependent life together as Jesus’ surrogate family members, house churches exemplified life in God’s Kingdom to the world. House churches literally opened the door for those around them to enter the Kingdom. While the earliest Christ-followers lived lives set apart for God, they were anything but set apart from the world.

\(^{79}\) Gillespie, 25.
Chapter 6

From a Kingdom of Priests to a Separate Clergy and Laity

Introduction

This chapter will address the simultaneous development that occurred when Christians began meeting in dedicated church buildings rather than homes. The development was the emergence of two classes of Christ-followers: the laity and the clergy. A brief biblical survey will demonstrate that throughout the Bible God intended for all his people to be a kingdom of priests. God’s people have certain priestly functions in relation to God, to each other, and to people who do not know God. We will see what led to the development of the clergy class. We will also see that the Reformation, which called for a return to the priesthood of all believers, did not fulfill that call.

In the previous chapter, we gained a glimpse of Christian community as it might have functioned in private domestic spaces. The logical next step for Christians who could afford it was to turn over their whole house and remodel it for the exclusive use of Christian meetings and activities while they relocated to another private dwelling of their own. The first buildings dedicated solely for Christian worship were actually converted homes, the earliest surviving example dating AD 232. At the time, this was a completely innocent and generous gift on the part of very wealthy Christians, who could not anticipate the long-term consequences resulting from this initial step toward dedicated church buildings.

Persecution, combined with the Christians’ confidence in the imminent return of Christ deterred them from investing much in the construction of church buildings and basilicas at the beginning. But in AD 313, when the Edict of Milan issued under Constantine

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guaranteed the full toleration of Christianity, everything changed.\textsuperscript{81} Prior to Constantine, only those prepared to suffer violent persecution would risk affiliating themselves with Christianity. After the Edict of Milan the culture became hospitable to Christianity and people discovered there were social, political, and economic advantages to being a Christian. Huge, monumental basilicas came into existence to accommodate the larger and larger numbers of worshippers.

As numbers of people increased, so did the need for full-time leaders dedicated to their oversight. From the fourth century on, the focus of church became the building and the focus of its ministry, its professional leaders; participation in God’s Kingdom ministry waned:

The Christians meeting in the dedicated churches and basilicas show an understanding of themselves different from that of the Christians meeting in the house churches. Leadership became concentrated in fewer hands, the hands of a special class of holy people. Church activities became stylized ritual. The building rather than the community became the temple of God.\textsuperscript{82}

The development and consequences of the movement from house church to dedicated building led to God’s people understanding ministry as confined to certain times and places.

A simultaneous movement, the development of the clergy, resulted in God’s people’s understanding of ministry as confined to certain persons as well. During the first two centuries of church history, when there were no dedicated church buildings, neither were there any clergy. Within Jesus’ community in the gospels, “there is no distinction between priests and laity, nor is there any hierarchy among the disciples—service being the sole principle of rule as well as the single criterion for greatness (e.g. Mark 9:35/Luke 9:48; Mark

\textsuperscript{81} Donald W. Treadgold, \textit{A History of Christianity} (Belmont: Nordland Publishing Company, 1979), 31.

\textsuperscript{82} Branick, 15.
Stevens shows here how there is no biblical concept of laity as Christians now understand it:

The word 'laypersons' (laikoi) was first used by Clement of Rome at the end of the first century, but was never used by an inspired apostle in Scripture to describe second-class, untrained and unequipped Christians. It ought to be eliminated from our vocabulary. 'Laity', in its proper New Testament sense of laos—the people of God—is a term of great honour denoting the enormous privilege and mission of the whole people of God. . . . (1 Pet. 2:9; Ex. 19:6). . . .

The word 'clergy' comes from the Greek work kleros, which means the 'appointed or endowed' ones. It is used in Scripture not for the leaders of the people but for the whole people [Col. 1:12; Eph. 1:11; Gal. 3:29] . . . .

. . . In no situation do the apostles use this term [kleros] to describe appointment to an ecclesiastical office . . . the term was not used for 'clergy' until the third century. Simultaneously the term 'laity' reappears. As Alexandre Faivre shows, laypersons can only exist when they have an opposite against which they can define themselves and, until the second century, there simply was no such opposite!84

It is ironic that this shift in the surrounding culture, from hostile to hospitable, would mark the beginning of the impotence of the Church. For the first time ever, in this new climate with its freedom of religion, beautiful church buildings, and a clergy class emerging to take care of “ministry,” Christians could sit back and relax. That is exactly what they did, and so the consequences of that passivity and comfort unfolded. The rest of this chapter will describe the development of a clergy class and a laity as we know it today.

_The Priesthood of All Believers_

While there is no distinct clergy-class in the New Testament, there is unambiguous instruction in the New Testament concerning a new High Priest, and a fresh reminder to Christ’s followers regarding their role of “royal priesthood.” Jesus is now the high priest,85

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who has “offered for all time one sacrifice for sins.” Christ’s followers may now directly “approach the throne of grace with confidence” because Jesus is presently seated “at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven” and “serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.” There is no longer a need for any human being to represent another human being before God; Jesus alone now has that function:

Each member of the Christian community is authorized “through Jesus Christ” to exercise personally the priestly privilege of direct access to God. The high priesthood of Jesus invites believers into the sphere of “immediacy” in their relationship with God.

With Jesus now acting as High Priest, Christ’s followers have their own role as holy priesthood. This concept, well known as the “priesthood of all believers,” is conventionally associated with 1 Pet. 2:4, 5, 9, 10:

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God an precious to him—you also, the living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . .

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

What is particularly relevant to this study is the association of the community of believers with both the temple and the priesthood. As discussed in the previous section, church is not a physical building, but the community of God’s people. Or, to use the expression found in this

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86 Heb. 7:26-28, 10:12-14.
87 Heb. 4:16.
88 Heb. 1:3, 8:1, 12:2.
89 Heb. 8:2.
90 Gillespie, 27.
passage from 1 Peter, church is a “spiritual house” made up of members of the “holy priesthood.”

Hebrews 13:15-16 supplies further instruction on the role of the holy priesthood who make up the spiritual house. They are to act as priests by offering two kinds of sacrifices: (1) praise to God and (2) ministry of good deeds and sharing generously with others in need. There is both a vertical and a horizontal dimension in the ministry of the priesthood of all believers.

Protestants have highlighted the vertical dimension, the Christian’s direct access to God. However, the horizontal dimension of believer’s priestly ministry on behalf of others has received less attention. As Thomas Gillespie says, “authentic priestly ministry is not exercised merely in one’s one behalf. It is also a service rendered in behalf of others, of all others.”

Not only does the “royal priesthood” of Christ-followers now enjoy direct access to God through their high priest Jesus, they also have the responsibility of following in Jesus’ footsteps, making a sacrifice of ministry on behalf of the world. As agents of reconciliation, God’s people serve as mediators, representing and interceding to God, on behalf of all those who have yet to enter God’s Kingdom. As “living sacrifices” (Rom. 12:1) they also do good deeds and share resources with others in need:

. . . [T]he priestly ministry of God’s laity requires a willingness to “show and tell” the good news of his love for the world. . . . It demands public sacrifices of personal obedience to Christ on the altar of life’s daily affairs. . . .

God’s temple people go forth into the world under orders recognizing no artificial distinctions between sacred and secular spheres of sovereignty, living salvation in the place of their individual calling, invading the precincts of the profane under the banner of God’s claim upon the earth. God’s “royal priesthood” serves him in the world beneath the high priesthood of Christ, enjoying direct access to the divine presence, using that access to intercede for the world with which it has identified itself in obedience to the model of the earthly ministry of Jesus.

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91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., 31-2.
Although the 1 Pet. passage is often cited as the basis for the priesthood of all believers, God meant for His people to have this identity all along. Gen. 12:2-3, God’s first articulation of the Abrahamic covenant, indicates that from Israel’s very conception, God intended to bless all peoples on earth through all members of His holy nation. The expression “kingdom of priests” is introduced early in the Old Testament in Exod. 19:6, when God announces to Moses on the first of their three mountaintop meetings, “you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” This occurs before the Levites were singled out to minister as priests in the tabernacle. The priestly function of God’s Kingdom of priests is to be a conduit of God’s blessing to all the nations of the world:

The laos as a whole is God’s “possession,” chosen not for privilege alone but for the privilege of service. Notice also that the nature of this service is spelled out in direct connection with God’s claim upon “all the earth.” Israel is called from ‘among all the peoples’ to serve as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” in behalf of the kingdoms and nations of the world. In this priestly service, Israel represents God to the world and the world to God. This people, the laos of God, is called, constituted, and commissioned to fulfill a mediating ministry.  

The “priesthood of all believers” is an identity God introduces in the Old Testament; the New Testament simply redefines and reinforces what this means for the new Israel—Christ’s followers:

As in ancient Israel, so also in the new Israel the laity are those who ‘belong to the people,’ to the people who belong to God, to the God who in Jesus Christ calls them to a mediating ministry in behalf of the world. . . .

. . . The vision of a priestly ministry turned outward to the world may seem at first contradictory because of our common association of a priesthood with cultic duties performed in the service of a sanctuary. . . . Priestly service suggests withdrawal from the world rather than involvement in it. . . . Yet the Christian community should remember that in Jesus Christ the priesthood of the laos of God has been redefined.”

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93 Ibid., 15-6.

94 Ibid., 17-9.
God’s people ministering on behalf of the world, herein called Kingdom ministry, is a theme that runs throughout the entire Bible. Later on in the Old Testament, much of the criticism God levels at Israel through the prophets relates to Israel’s neglect of this responsibility. The Levites were the dedicated temple ministers who made sacrifices, taught, provided music, and carried out other tasks related to temple worship. Over time, the Israelites came to equate obedience to God with offering some obligatory sacrifices and showing up for the temple ministers’ execution of cultic rituals in the sanctuary. The Israelites became complacent, feeling smug and secure in their chosen-ness as God’s people. They were content to let a select group, the Levites, serve them as priests and represent them before God, while forgetting about their own priestly responsibility of mediating God’s love to the world. God reminded them on multiple occasions that what He really wanted from them was not sacrifices, but acts of justice and mercy toward others.  

The Office-Function Debate

Protestant traditions affirm the priesthood of all believers, but some point to *episkopoi, presbuteroi,* and *diakonos* in the New Testament as the biblical sanction for a separate clergy class. Some view bishops, elders, and deacons respectively, as early church offices and furthermore, see these offices as precursors to the clergy class and evidence of the beginning of hierarchical institutional structures. Both Banks and Palma, however, point out that Paul had plenty of words he could have used for church officials if he had wanted us to understand church officers in the sense we do now. Instead, he almost uniformly uses the

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95 1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 40:6-8, 51:16-17; Prov. 21:3; Hosea 6:6; Mic. 6:8; Zech. 7:4-9.
word *diakonia*, service.\(^{96}\) This choice of words suggests that Paul would have the church view ecclesial functions as simply the service of leadership within the Christian community:

There is no New Testament term that differentiates office from ministry. The three most common terms in the Greek to designate the concept of office were *arche/archon, time* and *telos*. Yet nowhere in the New Testament are these terms applied to leaders of the Church. But even though there is no equivalent in the New Testament for this concept of office, the term *charisma*\(^\text{a}\) describes in a theologically exact and comprehensive way the essence and scope of every ecclesiastical ministry and function. . . .” There appears to be on the part of Paul a deliberate attempt to avoid distinction between clergy and laity.\(^ {97}\)

Paul may have been attempting to avoid a distinction between clergy and laity but Bradshaw shows that the new Israel, like the old, was bent on giving birth to such a distinction:

. . . [B]y the end of the first century one can already detect the beginnings of one of the most significant developments in the history of ministry in the Church, the movement from charism to office. Ministries that members of the community once performed without official appointment come to be clericalized, and the liturgical *actions* are turned into liturgical *offices*. As a result, the possibility of lay people exercising individual ministries within the liturgy sharply declines, virtually to the point of extinction.\(^ {98}\)

Along with the development of offices came the development of formal protocols and rites for ordination. Ordination is another major topic with a long history of its own but despite what various church traditions have come to require and observe today, there are no such prescriptions in the New Testament: “All that we can say for certain is that the important thing for ministering is the divine gift, and that the essential rite in the earliest time appears to have been that of the laying on of hands with prayer.”\(^ {99}\)

\(^{96}\) Banks, 131.

\(^{97}\) Anthony D. Palma, "Spiritual Gifts -- Basic Considerations," *Pneuma* 1, no. 2 (1979): 17. (In this quote, Palma has drawn from the work of Eduard Schweizer & Ernst Kasemann).


References to ordination are few and debatable, and neither the word “ordination” nor “ordain” were used in the technical sense the church uses now. In the few instances Greek words are translated “ordain,” the verbs differ and they all have a meaning similar to “appoint”.¹⁰⁰

There is no factor unifying either those who lay on hands, or those upon whom hands are laid, nor the purpose of the act, other than disciples supporting and strengthening other disciples to receive the Holy Spirit’s help on the journey in the Way. It is not until the much later text of 1 Timothy 4:14 that one hears of laying on of hands in a more formal sense by the council of elders (Greek presbyterion). But even there, it refers back to the “gift” given to Timothy, who is elsewhere in the New Testament repeatedly referred to simply as Paul’s “co-worker” and “brother,” and not as a holder of any formal ministerial office (e.g. Acts 16:1-3; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; Phil. 1:1).¹⁰¹

Hinson makes an interesting observation in his study on ordination in Christian history: “Several bits of evidence point to an essentially missionary nuance in ordination. All four New Testament allusions (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6) are set within missionary contexts.”¹⁰² In these passages, the laying on of hands happened when Christ-followers were being sent out, dispatched, for ministry beyond their local church.

The first evidence of ordination becoming an extended rite, rather than simple laying on of hands, shows up in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus about AD 217.¹⁰³ From then on, ordination shifted from being a simple gesture to recognize a Christ-follower’s particular function in Christ’s body to an extended rite to set apart clergy as a special class.

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¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
¹⁰¹ Wes Howard-Brook, The Church before Christianity (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 120.
¹⁰³ Ibid., 487.
The Development of the Clergy Class and Institutional Structure

Once Jesus and the twelve apostles were all gone, Christian leaders in the second and third centuries felt an urgent need to create a more centralized, unified organizational structure. Their solution was to further formalize the appointment of the incumbent leaders and “guardians of the truth” who would replace the apostles, making way for a distinct, elite class of ministers. Stevens clarifies their motivations:

. . . [I]n the second and third centuries a definite clergy-lay distinction arose largely from three influences: (1) imitation of the secular structures of the Greek-Roman world not unlike the professional-lay distinctions in the modern world; (2) the transference of the Old Testament priesthood model to the leadership of the church; and (3) popular piety which elevated the Lord's Supper to a mystery which required priestly administration.  

Support for the underlying premises of these influences is not found in the New Testament, yet Christ-followers looked backward to the Old Testament and outside to surrounding culture for guidance when under pressure to establish authority.

The original and legitimate source of pressure came from the threat of heresies:

In the face of heresy threats (Docetism, Gnosticism and Judaizing tendencies) Ignatius of Antioch (AD 50-110) appealed for the necessity of having a single bishop as the focus of unity. In the works of Tertullian (AD 197-200) we are given a structure for the church in which the laity are identified with the plebs (ordinary people) to be distinguished from the priestly or ecclesiastical order of bishops, presbyters and deacons.  

In the New Testament, one of the primary functions of the apostles and early church leaders was preaching and teaching. In Acts 6:2-4, the Twelve wanted to give highest priority to their “ministry of the word,” and they asked the church to choose seven others to take over their food distribution ministry. Eph. 4:11-16 implies that mature Christians are able to

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105 Ibid., 40.
discern between true and false teaching, and that there were a variety of deceitful teachers/teachings around to confuse the immature.

There are ample scriptural references to the importance of truth-full teaching of God’s people so that they would “no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching,” but instead “grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” As they spread the gospel and bore witness to Christ, New Testament church leaders demonstrated a “knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 1:1) and disseminated “sound doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:9, 2:1), to use two of the apostle Paul’s expressions. The original apostles’ authority came from their firsthand exposure to Jesus’ instruction and witness to his resurrection. Subsequent Christ-followers, however, had to rely on the accurate passing on of Jesus’ instruction and witness that he indeed was alive. Once the earthly ministry of Jesus and the twelve apostles came to an end, maintaining accuracy and consistency quickly became a challenge.

Like other vital aspects of the earliest New Testament communities of Christ-followers, the recognition of charismata-based ministry functions in the increasingly institutionalized church disappeared in the first two centuries as well: “By the late second century, Christians looked with suspicion upon charismatics . . . they increasingly ascribed to the rite [laying on of hands] itself, as administered by the bishop, the power of conferring gifts of the Spirit.” The shifting of emphasis from charisma to office created an obstruction.

Recognition of the charismata the Holy Spirit had distributed throughout all members of the laos, including those given to apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers

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106 Eph. 4:14-15.
107 Hinson, 487.
(Ephesians 4:11-12) to equip all members of Christ’s body for their Holy Spirit appointed ministries declined. Appointment to an office did not make up for deficiencies in character and/or lack of a particular charisma, nevertheless, an inversion occurred in the institutionalized church. Church office holders began to be viewed as “the ministers.” The clergy’s authority came to rest in an appointment by men to an office, rather than appointment to ministry by the Holy Spirit, according to the charismata the Holy Spirit distributed amongst members in the Body of Christ for the benefit of the whole church and Kingdom advancement (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

The formal, hierarchical clergy-lay distinction that emerged during the second and third centuries solidified in the fourth and fifth centuries. This distinction only continued to deepen through the sixteenth century leading up to the Reformation. In reaction, some of the laity explored new outlets such as monasticism and forms of ascetic life, but these remained in the shadow of the institutionalized church:

... [T]he laity, far from being as in New Testament times the people of God with no stratification though with varying functions, were now definitely in a class by themselves. The clergy were in another class. This might not have been so serious save for the fact that the laity were now definitely under the clergy, under them in power and authority, in ecclesiastical status, and supposedly in the Christian life and in the moral demands expected of them. From this subordination the laity has never fully recovered.

Once established, the clergy class, whether meaning to or not, has held powerful sway in encouraging the passive, apathetic posture of the laity toward their own priestly ministry in

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108 Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 130-55. “Equip” has been translated from *katartismos* found in Eph. 4:12. Ogden’s study of the Greek word suggests equipping ministry is a comprehensive role of: mending/restoration toward wholeness, instruction in God’s Word, and practical training for specific ministries.


111 Harkness, 51.
the body and in the world. But the laity too have colluded to perpetuate this; it has always proven easier for the majority to let a select minority assume the priestly responsibility God intended all his people share equally.

The Incomplete Reformation

Protestants credit the Reformation, the great watershed renewal movement of the sixteenth century emphasizing the “priesthood of all believers,” with returning ministry to the laity. Paul Bradshaw, Greg Ogden, Paul Stevens and others, however, argue that this is an oversimplification:

. . . [I]n spite of all their emphasis upon congregational involvement in worship, the Reformers maintained a clear and rigid distinction between the role of the ordained minister and that of the congregation: the former was there to minister and the latter to be ministered unto.113

The Reformers exalted the office of preaching. The old priesthood was simply replaced by the new preacher. Instead of the minister of sacraments, you have the minister of the word as the most important part of the body. Exaltation of the office of preaching above all others has had a debilitating effect. It has created passivity by turning the church into an audience.114

Stevens points out another consequence of exalting the ministry of the word: “The scholarship implicit in such a ministry ultimately involved taking the Bible out of the hands of the layperson again and putting it into the hands of the biblical scholar.” Eventually, this requirement of scholarship became explicit and by the nineteenth century, the Protestants had adopted the Catholic seminary system to ensure pastors were thoroughly equipped academically and socialized into a clerical culture.115 In spite of emphasizing the priesthood

113 Bradshaw, 56.
114 Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*, 72-3.
of all believers, the laity continued in their spectator role and the Reformation did not return the ministry to the laity as completely as supposed.

Karkkainen maintains that in general Luther “was on the right track in viewing the church as a communion of saints; unfortunately, he did not develop the idea in relation to ministry. . . . Luther’s view of the church still manifested hierarchical notions even if his theology did not necessarily lead to a hierarchical view.”

A prime example of this is that while the Reformers rejected the notion that ordination conferred an essential distinction between clergy and laity, Reformed traditions continue to reserve the word clergy to refer to those who are ordained:

One of the reasons the priesthood of all believers has not been realized is that we practice a priesthood within a priesthood. On the one hand, we affirm that a “minister” participates as every Christian does in the priesthood of all believers, but in the very next breath we list special responsibilities that are marked “for the ordained only.” We cannot have it both ways. What is affirmed in one moment is taken away the next. What is the difference between “the ministry” and “lay ministry”? Ordination.

A “radical reformation” did subsequently spin off the Reformation and the traditions it spawned “took seriously the ministry of all believers: Quakers (with no clergy), Moravians (with lay missionaries), Puritans (primarily lay-centered); Baptists and Anabaptists (whose preachers were usually laypersons); Disciples of Christ and Methodists (all lay oriented).”

Bradshaw, quoting Franklin Littell, points out that these same groups got much closer, in practice, to the situation in the first two centuries of church history, when the church was without a laity but full of clergy: “It has sometimes wrongly been said that the Anabaptists,

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Baptists, Quakers, Mennonites, Brethren and like groups have no true doctrine of ordination and frequently no clergy at all. A more perceptive oversimplification would be to say not that they have no clergy but that they have no laity."¹¹⁹

By retaining the requirement of ordination for ministers of the word and sacrament, and exalting that office above all others, Reformed traditions continue to perpetuate the clergy-lay class distinction. In doing so, Ogden charges the Reformed church with having “unfinished business”¹²⁰ and remaining in need of a “Second Reformation,”¹²¹ which we will discuss in Chapter 8. The bottom line is that the structures that originally emerged in the third century remain in place in the twenty-first century.¹²²

Conclusion

In this section, we observed there are neither laypersons nor clergy in the New Testament. Rather, in both Old and New Testaments, all God’s people are priests having a ministry of intercession and service on behalf of others in the world who have yet to enter God’s Kingdom (Kingdom ministry). Once the clergy-lay class distinction was established, clergy came to be seen as the ministers, and the laity seen as the recipients, audience, and adjuncts of the clergy.

The movement from members of Christ’s body serving one another according to charisma-based functions to a hierarchy of church offices ultimately distracted and divided members of Christ’s body when it came to fulfilling their Kingdom ministry on behalf of the

¹¹⁹ Bradshaw: 57.

¹²⁰ Ogden, Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God.

¹²¹ Ibid., 9.

world. For the majority of the *laos*, their paramount ministry should be their work on behalf of the Kingdom in their everyday world, not the church. Along with the introversion of ministry toward the institution, and preoccupation with maintaining institutional health, a second distraction emerged. With offices, structures, and professionals in place, the institutionalized church became increasingly reliant on human systems, strategies, and talent and decreasingly reliant on the Holy Spirit’s guidance and empowerment for ministry.

Contrary to popular belief, the Reformation did not return ministry to the laity so completely as supposed; the office of preaching simply replaced the old priesthood and the laity continued in their spectator role. In many traditions, ordination continues to be the rite that distinguishes clergy from laity, yet ordination is nowhere prescribed in the scriptures in the technical sense utilized by certain traditions today.
SECTION 3

OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS
Chapter 7

The Twentieth-Century Solution: The Lay Ministry Movement and Spiritual Gifts Discovery

Introduction

So far we have seen how two monumental second century developments—the movement from house church to dedicated building, and the lay-clergy class distinction—reduced ministry to select services, performed by a select group of people, for those inside a church building. These consequences, for the large part have endured in the institutionalized church, persisting even through the Reformation, and have interfered with the Church fulfilling Jesus’ Kingdom ministry. Throughout church history certain traditions and movements have challenged the lay-clergy class distinction and its tendency to isolate both ministers and ministry inside church walls. The most contemporary, and some believe monumental, movement to counteract this was the charismatic renewal movement of the late twentieth century, which fueled the every-member-ministry slogan and an intense interest in spiritual gifts across all traditions.

This chapter will describe the value of spiritual gifts discovery programs and tools, while evaluating their weaknesses and limitations. In particular, the limitations discussed are the narrow view of equating gifts with abilities and the failure to see the Holy Spirit’s involvement in leading believers to minister in the world beyond church building.
The Emergence of the Every-Member-a-Minister Campaign

In the late 1970s, David Watson lamented the Reformation’s failure to undo the lay-clergy class distinction and Protestant denominations’ ongoing preference for offices and structures over spiritual gifts and body ministry:

Most Protestant denominations have been as priest-ridden as the Roman Catholics. It is the minister, vicar, or pastor who has dominated the whole proceedings. In other words, the clergy-lay divisions have continued in much the same way as in pre-Reformation times, and the doctrine of spiritual gifts and body ministry have been largely ignored.¹

Even as Watson made this claim, a monumental movement was in the making—the every-member-a-minister movement. Charismata had been recognized and manifested in marginal segments of the body of Christ throughout church history, but something new started to happen in the 1970s that “crossed the boundaries of more ecclesiastical traditions than in any other time this side of the first century.”² (Wagner, p 19) C. Peter Wagner wrote in Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow,

A relatively new thing happened to the Church of Jesus Christ in America during the decade of the seventies. The third Person of the Trinity came into His own, so to speak. . . .

One of the most prominent facets of this new experience of the Holy Spirit is the rediscovery of spiritual gifts.³

Wagner credits a non-Pentecostal pastor, Ray Stedman, and his book Body Life, with launching the spiritual gifts discovery enterprise that churches across the theological spectrum would turn into congregational campaigns at the close of the twenty-first century:

[Nineteen seventy-two] can be considered the date that the concept of the ministry of all believers attained a permanent status in contemporary Christianity. . . .

¹ David Watson, I Believe in the Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 69.
³ Ibid., 13.
The ripple effects of *Body Life* have had such a profound influence, rare is the church today that will advocate that the professional pastor or staff should do all the ministry of the church. Although some have not been able to implement it as rapidly as others, most affirm at least in theory that laypeople should be empowered to discover their spiritual gifts and through them, to do the ministry of the church.⁴

Greg Ogden similarly observes, “Nearly five hundred years after the Reformation, there are rumblings in the church that appear to be creating a climate for something so powerful that we can call it a New Reformation.”⁵ (Ogden 18) Ogden is so confident of the impact of the New Reformation that in 2003 he writes,

When this period of church history is written, it may well be labeled the Age of the Holy Spirit. . . . through all these elements of renewal runs the radical transformation in *self-perception* of every believer. Followers of Christ in this age will see themselves as Spirit-filled ministers who are a part of the ministry given to all Christians. In a word, Christians are priests, ministering the presence of God on behalf of the people of God and the lost world.⁶

Substantial progress has been made across traditions in regard to all Christ-followers perceiving themselves as Spirit-filled ministers serving on behalf of the people of God. As Wagner puts it, “most [churches] affirm at least in theory that laypeople should be empowered to discover their spiritual gifts and through them, to *do the ministry of the church* [emphasis added].”⁷ However, when it comes to Christians perceiving themselves as “priests. . . ministering the presence of God. . . on behalf of the lost world,” the second aspect of Ogden’s vision, progress is lagging. Many Christians do not know how to consciously, intentionally, actively “minister God’s presence to the lost world” God has sent them into. Meanwhile the church has been complacent to encourage and equip them, gladly absorbing most of its members’ “ministry of God’s presence” for its own benefit.

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⁴Ibid., 20.
⁵ Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*, 18.
⁶ Ibid., 37.
⁷ Wagner, 20.
Reggie McNeal has called the “every member a minister” campaign “myopic,” meaning it has been defined largely in terms of church ministry, with lay people seen as resources to get church work done.\(^8\) McNeal connected this specifically with the enthusiasm over spiritual gifts discovery and helping church members find their ministry. Spiritual gifts discovery programs tend to be used by church staff to mine church members’ talent and recruit for church jobs. Thus the volunteer opportunities presented to members with newly discovered gifts only end up serving the body of Christ.

McNeal also goes on to speak of “the new Reformation” only in a slightly different way than Wagner or Ogden: “The first Reformation was about freeing the church. The new Reformation is about freeing God’s people from the church (the institution).”\(^9\)

Although the initiators of spiritual gifts discovery programs probably had the best of intentions, the resulting movement has kept Christ-followers’ ministry confined within the church and neglected to free and mobilize them for Kingdom ministry in the world. Inherent in this movement are several factors we will explore in this chapter:

1. Popular Christian literature on spiritual gifts and spiritual assessment tools developed over the last three decades were often based on limited, casually interpreted biblical texts, leading to authoritative teaching that was in fact highly extrapolated.

2. The Church has tended to motivate its members by emphasizing the benefits of the Holy Spirit’s ministry to the individual and the body of Christ.

3. Spiritual gifts have been interpreted as God-given abilities or strengths but there are abundant biblical examples of God working through individuals’ weaknesses.

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\(^8\) McNeal, 45.

\(^9\) Ibid., 43.
The Limitations of Spiritual Gifts Discovery Assessment Tools

Enthusiasm over spiritual gifts and body ministry, originally catalyzed by Stedman’s book *Body Life*, inspired considerable follow-up literature on the subject. The focus of the books that followed in the eighties and nineties was the Holy Spirit’s distribution of gifts (charismata) within the body of Christ and how they benefit both individual Christ-followers and the collective body of Christ. This emphasis can be seen in the titles of two well-known books from this time period: *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* by C. Peter Wagner (1979) and *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ* by Bruce Bugbee (1995).

Bruce Bugbee founded Network Ministries International in California in 1996, and soon after, along with Bill Hybels and Don Cousins, developed a program called the Network, originally implemented at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. Network remains one of the most widely recognized spiritual gifts/ministry discovery processes. The Network process guides participants in discovering their “God-given passion, spiritual gifts, and personal style.”

Rick Warren simultaneously used a parallel concept at Saddleback for almost 20 years and in 2002, introduced the acronym SHAPE (Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experiences) to a global audience in his bestseller, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Erik Rees, a Saddleback associate, took Warren’s acronym and expanded its implications and applications in *S.H.A.P.E.: Finding and Fulfilling Your Unique Purpose for Life*.

Many books, tools, and programs analogous to Network and SHAPE have been developed under different names. What these vehicles share in common is the goal of increasing a Christ-follower’s self-awareness of spiritual gifts, personality/temperament,

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natural talents/abilities, heart/burden/passion, and transformative life experiences and guiding the participant in matching those personal attributes to a place of ministry. A variety of assessments and reflective exercises have been developed as discovery tools for each of these categories.

Spiritual gifts and temperament assessments tend to resemble psychological assessment instruments but lack psychometric validity and reliability. The most complex and lengthy spiritual gifts inventory of all, the 125-question Wagner-modified Houts Questionaire, inspired many similar variations of spiritual gifts inventories. These inventories are typically comprised of dozens of questions to which one responds by numerically rating oneself, and adding totals to “score” oneself upon completion to determine one’s spiritual gifts.

The issue with these scientific-looking inventories is that when they are subjected to psychometric standards, these tools have proven questionable in several aspects. They have been shown to be ineffective at distinguishing between spiritual gifts and natural abilities, as well as between spiritual gifts and personality. Validity issues have also been reported with regard to gender and overlap between definitions of gifts. Nevertheless, churches and individuals have placed a high degree of confidence in the validity of assessments developed


12 Ibid.

13 Kenneth J. Stone, “Relationship between Personality and Spiritual Gifts” (Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology, George Fox, 1991), 98.


by reputable Christian authors. Christian psychologist, Kenneth Stone suggests that “this quest for discovering one’s gift through testing seems to be a twentieth century phenomenon and a by-product of our fascination with science. . . . Perhaps it is this world-view that is the source of the widespread interest in discovering one’s spiritual gifts through scientific-looking tests.”

The premise behind Network and most spiritual gifts discovery programs is that Christians can discover their ministry, that is, where to serve, by first discovering their spiritual gift(s). Rick Warren disagrees:

Many books get the discovery process backwards. They say, “Discover your gift and then you’ll know what ministry you’re supposed to have.” It actually works the exact opposite way. Just start serving, experimenting with different ministries, and then you’ll discover your gifts. Until you’re actually involved in serving, you’re not going to know what you’re good at.

Recently, Bill Hybels described making a conversion from the original premise of Network to Warren’s approach, as can be seen by the chapter entitled “Just Jump In” found in Hybels’ 2004 book *The Volunteer Revolution*. Here, Hybels corrects himself by saying,

If I had to sum up the key to finding the perfect serving niche, I’d do it with one word: experiment.

That’s not what I would have said twenty years ago or even ten. Back then, I would have said to start by figuring out your spiritual gift, that divinely empowered ability given to every Christ-follower to most effectively advance the purposes of God. Read 1 Corinthians 12, I would have suggested—and Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, and Ephesians 4. Then take a spiritual gift assessment test.

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16 Stone, 99-100.


19 Ibid.
Hybels shares several lessons since Willow Creek’s implementation of the Network program beginning in the 1980s:

1. “An attempt to help people maximize their effectiveness without draining their energy slowly slid into an ‘I can’t serve until I find the perfect spot’ mentality.”

2. “We had mistakenly assumed that the right assessment tool would assure people of discovering their God-given gifts. . . . For many people, however, taking an assessment test was not enough. . . . [T]he approach often raises more questions than answers.”

3. “We have learned that spiritual gifts are less something we ‘figure out ahead of time’ than something God reveals to us as we serve.”

4. “Here’s what we recommend to potential volunteers these days: Embrace wholeheartedly your fundamental identity as a servant of Jesus Christ. Use whatever understanding you have of your personality, passions, areas of interests, talents, and preferences to guide you in a general serving direction. Look at the needs of your church and community. Drape a servant’s towel over your arms and get busy.”

Hybels’ about-face is significant given that he is a co-founder of the Network program.

Stedman, the man who catalyzed the whole movement, had suggested a very simple way to discover spiritual gifts in *Body Life*: 1) try out a gift you think you would *like* to have, 2) watch for improvement and development, and 3) look for final confirmation of your gift from others in the body of Christ. Both Warren’s and Hybels’ approaches reaffirm Stedman’s original tack.

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20 Ibid., 70-71.

Ogden reports another weakness with programmatic gifts discovery processes adding further credence to the “just jump in” tactic. He writes, “This deductive approach is limited and will reach no more than 25 percent of the congregation . . . most people will discover their ministries by doing or experimentation rather than through the cerebral approach of a class.”

The work of Christian scholars in the fields of biblical studies and clinical psychology supports the “just jump in” approach as well. Schaibley’s analysis and criticisms of spiritual gifts discovery programs suggests that the “just jump in” approach is a more biblical approach. He points out that nowhere does the Bible exhort Christ-followers to “discover their gifts”:

Specifically, it is not the contextually identified intent of those passages which are cited as “spiritual gifts lists” to instigate, promote or encourage a gift discovery process. Discovering one’s gift is not an apostolic emphasis. . . .
The Bible is silent on the need, necessity, or desirability of the church guiding her members in the spiritual gifts discovery process.

The exegetical work of other New Testament scholars, including that of Kenneth Berding and John Ekem which is detailed below, supports Schaibley’s conclusion: the church has both distracted and confused its members with complicated, and biblically uncalled-for spiritual gifts discovery processes.

Numerous Christian authors cite a single verse, 1 Cor. 12:1, “Now about the gifts of the spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed,” as the biblical mandate to discover one’s gifts. However, Berding, Bruner, and Ekem all question both the translation of the Greek word pneumatikos, which appears as “spiritual gifts” in this verse in several

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22 Ogden, Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God, 181-2.

23 Schaibley, 426.
translations, as well as questioning the overall interpretation of the verse, when considered in
the context of the verse within the whole epistle. Berding, Bruner and Ekem all demonstrate
that pneumatikos refers more generically to “spiritual persons” or “spiritual things” rather
than specifically to spiritual gifts. Given the only other place Paul employs the word
pneumatikos (1 Cor. 14:1), Berding suggests that Paul would not normally use the word
himself. He instead uses it to mimic a word the Corinthians are fond of using in order to
address one of several issues in the Corinthian church that prompted Paul’s letter in the first
place.24 Bruner succinctly frames the context:

> In the next three chapters [1 Cor. 12-14] we are face to face with the spiritual problem
> par excellence in Corinth. The Corinthians had probably asked Paul for his opinion
> (or defense) in a matter which was beginning to concern them; What, or who, is truly
> spiritual? How is it possible, or is it possible at all, to test spiritual things or spiritual
> persons? And in particular, how is Christian spirituality to be expressed in a
> congregational meeting?25

Ekem, who understands the context similarly to Bruner, suggests a legitimate translation of 1
Cor. 12:1 could be: “In regard to the enquiry you made about the so-called ‘spiritual
persons’.”26 If we go with Ekem’s interpretation, the verse is not saying, “I do not want you
to be ignorant about what spiritual gift you have,” which further implies that one should set
out to intentionally discover one’s gifts. The verse instead is saying the Corinthians need to
learn to recognize what constitutes a “spiritual person” or a “spiritual thing” and what does
not. Paul spells this out earlier in 1 Cor. 2:6-16. The Corinthians apparently equated ecstatic

24 Kenneth Berding, What Are Spiritual Gifts?: Rethinking the Conventional View (Grand Rapids:

25 Frederick Dale Bruner, A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and the New

26 John David K. Ekem, "Spiritual Gifts" Or "Spiritual Persons"? 1 Corinthians 12:1a Revisited,"
states with being “spiritual” so Paul is correcting them and going on to tell them how to recognize true manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

In sum, spiritual gifts discovery tools have been built and utilized around some erroneous assumptions. Although they have the appearance of bona fide scientific tests, their creators lack training in the development of valid psychometric instruments and spiritual gifts tests should not be treated as such. The apostle Paul never envisioned Christians using such tests to find their gifts, nor did he promote any spiritual gifts discovery process in general. The strategy of discover-your-gift to discover your ministry has proven backwards. It is more biblical for Christ-followers to “just jump in” and pay attention to when, where and how the Holy Spirit ministers through them, to bless others in their church body and world.

An Underlying Problem: The Definition of “Spiritual Gift”

An even more fundamental problem impacting the usefulness of spiritual gifts discovery materials has been the authors’ neglect to carefully, biblically define “spiritual gift” in the first place:

Almost every book by preachers and scholars alike about the so-called spiritual gifts begins with a conventional definition of the spiritual gifts . . . These books rarely—in fact, almost never—include a defense of the definition, even though it’s foundational to everything else they plan to discuss.\(^{27}\)

Most popular literature, starting with Stedman’s *Body Life* and later including Wagner’s *Your Spiritual Gifts* and the massively well-known Network and SHAPE programs, defines spiritual gifts as Holy Spirit–given “abilities” to be exercised in ministry. The basic

\(^{27}\) Berding, 36.

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 232-4.

\(^{170}\) Ibid.
understanding, now taken for granted by the church at large, is that Spirit-given abilities are latent personal possessions of individuals, waiting to be discovered and exercised at the believer’s discretion. English speakers commonly use the word gift to refer to exceptional ability, capacity, or talent.

This understanding of gift as ability appears self-explanatory when English readers see the word “spiritual gifts” in their translations. However, both “gift” and “spiritual gift(s)” show up far more frequently in our English translations than the occurrences of Greek words that would literally render these words. The phrase “spiritual gifts,” as it occurs in a variety of English translations of the New Testament, has actually been translated from four different Greek words: charisma, pneumatikos[n], pneuma and phanerosis. Translators have created the phrase “spiritual gifts” as a dynamic equivalent concept to encompass a concept that is described with varying Greek vocabulary. Given that all translation involves an element of interpretation, further variations even occur between different translations.

Additionally, in English translations the phrase “spiritual gifts” only shows up in one out of the three New Testament passages popularly known as the “spiritual gift list” passages. “Spiritual gifts” appears only in English translations of 1 Cor. 12, while it does not appear in translations of Rom. 12:3-8 or Eph. 4:7-13, even though these are the passages authors of gifts discovery materials typically cite as naming lists of specific spiritual gifts Christians may possess.

Several New Testament scholars, including Max Turner, F. Dale Bruner, A. Bittlinger, Benny Aker, Michael Griffiths, and James Stitzinger, have done extensive exegetical work on spiritual gifts along with Berding. They offer the following alternative
conclusions and/or nuances in contrast to the oversimplified and one-dimensional “ability”
definition:

1. Turner: Paul refers to a wide variety of entities as charismata, of which some were charismatic irruptions that rendered the Spirit’s presence and activity a matter of immediate perception, in others the Spirit was more ‘immanent’, and to some the Spirit is not directly related at all. The second group could be swelled in ranks by all those occasions where Paul indicates the Spirit is responsible for enhanced abilities of any kind given for the service of Christ . . . even though he does not use the word [charisma] specifically to describe them. Paul does not appear to have a ‘concept’ of ‘spiritual gifts’.  

2. Bruner: A charisma or “grace” is first of all defined as a service (diakonia,[1 Cor. 12] v. 5). . . .
   . . . Paul looks at gifts from the paramount perspective of the congregation and from this view he does not value any gift simply in its existence but only in its understandable communication to others for their upbuilding. Indeed, it is questionable if, in Paul’s thought, a gift can be said to “exist” for the individual at all if it is not employed for the church.

3. Bittlinger: In [1 Cor.12] verses 4 to 6 the gifts of the Spirit are described in three ways as charismata, diaknoniai, and ergemata, i.e., as gifts, ministries, and workings.

4. Stitzinger, [like Bittlinger, highlights the three designations regarding pneumatikos in 1 Cor. 12:4-7]: Charismata are specific abilities or capabilities granted to believers . . . [diaknoniai, “ministries,”] are spheres in which the gifts are exercised (places and times in the church when gifts become visible in actual use and practice), and . . . [energemata, “effects,”] are happenings or effects that occur when gifts are employed.

5. Griffiths: Gifts are not personal attributes or acquisitions, but rather outpourings of God’s grace.
   Charismata are the results of grace and God’s grace is ministered to the congregation and manifested through spiritual gifts. . . .

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30 Bruner, 289-90.


... It should be noticed incidentally, that although we tend to talk about the ‘gifts of the Spirit’, in Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4 God the Father is the author of spiritual gifts and in Ephesians 4 they are the gifts of the ascended Christ. Moreover, in 1 Cor. 12:4-6 there is deliberate reference to all three Persons of the Trinity, ‘the same God . . . the same Lord . . . the same Spirit’. We see then that spiritual gifts (charismata) are the results of the grace of God, of all three Persons of the Godhead, poured out upon the church.33

6. Aker: Although the concept of ‘priest’ and ‘priesthood’ occurs in the New Testament, its role has changed significantly. The function then of believers is that of temple servants or ministers. The most common work (but not the only) for the believer is the word ‘servant’ or ‘minister’ (diaknonos). . . .

   . . . The most fundamental way to understand the ‘gifts’ or ‘ministries’ is through this major and fundamental reality—the temple. This means that at salvation every believer becomes a member of God’s temple, being the habitation of God’s Spirit. At conversion, then, every believer becomes a minister and takes on responsibilities relative to his or her maturity. Every new convert should immediately know about this and begin to look for opportunities to bless and serve. . . .

   . . . The gifts of the Spirit should more appropriately be thought of as ministries that flow out of one’s being part of the temple of God.34

7. Schatzmann: According to Paul’s usage of the concept, charismata meant a diversity of experienced concretions of the grace of God, sovereignly bestowed by the Spirit upon members of the community of believers and functioning interdependently for the purpose of the upbuilding of the church in love, thereby demonstrating the Lordship of Christ.35

While there is diversity among these perspectives, this brief survey demonstrates that careful biblical study clearly yields something different than the popularly held notion that a spiritual gift is simply and essentially an ability. Howard Snyder consolidates the main themes from the exegetes above and avoids the gifts-as-ability notion by succinctly defining a spiritual gift as: “God’s particular manifestation of grace in [a believer’s] life for ministry.”36

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36 Snyder, 173.
Berding advocates replacing outright the concept of “spiritual gifts” with “Spirit-given ministries”:

According to the contextual evidence in the letters of Paul, the so-called spiritual gifts should not be viewed as special abilities to do ministry; rather they should be viewed as the ministries themselves. Every believer has been assigned by the Holy Spirit to specific positions and activities of service, small and large, short-term and long-term. These ministry assignments have been given by the Holy Spirit to individual believers and, in turn, these individuals in their ministries have been given as gifts to the church.  

Berding is careful to say that he does not mean to make “ministry” the new technical definition for charisma but that “ministries is the concept which links these passages [1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Pet. 4:10-11] together, and that the various words used in the list passages function within this conception.

The practical outcome of Berding’s conception is noteworthy as it returns us to the same conclusion drawn in the previous section. Berding’s conception of spiritual ministries could potentially eliminate the need for spiritual-gifts discovery tools, and further substantiates the idea that a Christ-follower is more apt to discover their Spirit-appointed ministry by a “just-jump-in” approach than by complex self-analysis or completing lengthy inventories:

Someone who holds to the spiritual-gifts-as-abilities view must ask, (1) Which ministry should I serve in? and (2) Which special ability do I have or not have? . . . The person who follows the spiritual-ministries approach need ask only a single question—a question asked repeatedly throughout the history of Christianity: “Lord, where do you want me to serve?”

In sum, the shift from simply understanding “spiritual gifts” as abilities, to a fuller biblical understanding of “spiritual gifts” as the Holy Spirit’s particular manifestations of

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37 Berding, 32.


39 Berding, What Are Spiritual Gifts?: Rethinking the Conventional View, 201.
grace through a believer evidenced in ministry, has both theological and practical ramifications. These ramifications grow in importance as we go on to consider two more limitations of understanding gifts-as-abilities: this understanding can promote self-centeredness in both individuals and congregations, while at the same time overlook how the Holy Spirit can powerfully minister through believers’ weaknesses.

**The Problem with “Self-Fulfillment”**

Another weakness of spiritual gifts discovery materials is that they often appeal to two self-centered motivators: the personal benefit to the individual and the internal benefit to the body of Christ. The first refers to the promise of self-fulfillment that results from serving in one’s sweet spot of giftedness, and the second to the benefits of members’ investment of special abilities within their congregations, to their congregation.

There is no biblical basis for the appeal to self-fulfillment. This rationale for gifts discovery originates from American cultural values of individualism and personal fulfillment. Bruner points out the fallacy of this slant on spiritual gifts:

A charisma or “grace” is first of all defined as a “service” ([diakonia], [1 Cor.] v. 5). It is not, therefore, first of all or primarily a spiritual privilege for the individual, for his own edification, enjoyment, or distinction. As a service, a grace is given for others; it is there for the church. . . .

Paul’s trinity of source and distribution in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 concludes then with a clear statement of purpose: the varied services of the grace-gifts are all “for the common good.”

Charismata essentially refer to services that exist for the community, not for the individual. While an experience of fulfillment is a potential by-product of being a conduit of God’s

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40 Bugbee, 54.

41 Bruner, 289.
grace, such a rationale for discovering one’s gifts is nowhere to be found in the scriptures.

Aker aptly warns,

It is quite popular for churches and church seminars to feature classes and literature on gift assessments and discovery of personal giftedness. Abundant advertisements for them appear on the Internet and church bulletins. The weakness of this concentration is that it can promote self-centeredness and pride. . . . In contrast to our modern Western approach to the conception of the church and its ministry where gifts lie within the individual, Jesus focuses on the community. Gifts/ministries are determined more by community needs—not by individual inward desires or abilities.42

Some authors are careful to point out that spiritual gifts are for the benefit of the body of Christ, not the individual, but the discovery process itself begins with, and remains focused on, the individual. For example, the first sentence of S.H.A.P.E. by Erik Rees is “You are a masterpiece.”43 The benefit to Christ’s body, particularly the local body to which member in the discovery process belongs is a secondary consideration and priority.

Even when the context of the body is taken into consideration, it is often pastors and program staff who determine the ministry needs of the organization. These are determined by what volunteer personnel are required to operate church programs. Then, the spiritual gift–based ministry opportunities pastors and staff members present to their members as outlets for newly discovered gifts usually tie back to ministry programs those pastors and staff members produce inside the church. And those programs are determined largely in response to popular demand by church members who vote for their favorite programs with their attendance. Church members are more apt to vote for opportunities to “get fed” than opportunities to serve others. Ministries and programs addressing needs present among the

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42 Aker, 68.

weaker members of the body, or in the world beyond the church, come in a distant second place.

In sum, the lure of self-fulfillment exists at both the personal and corporate level in relation to spiritual gifts. Churches can encourage their members to discover their spiritual gifts with a “what’s in it for me?” attitude, but whole congregations can also assume this attitude if they are only asking, “how can we utilize our members’ abilities for programs that benefit ourselves?”

*The Strength-in-Weakness Paradox*

Certainly, God’s grace can flow through each member for mutual ministry inside the body of Christ; the Bible explicitly states in 1 Cor. 12:7, “to each one a manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” In Eph. 4, Paul explains that Christ himself has apportioned grace to some members of the body for equipping and building up other members of the body. These two passages, along with Rom. 12 are most often cited in connection with spiritual gifts and their function within the body of Christ. Berding refers to these key passages as well, applying his distinctly “spiritual ministries” perspective:

... Paul’s central concern in Ephesians 4; Romans 12; and 1 Corinthians 12-14 is the building up of the body of Christ through the ministry roles of its members. ... what is the body metaphor about? The metaphor is about the roles in which the Holy Spirit has placed each individual. Paul says it in these words: “But now *God has placed the members*, each one of them in the body, just as he desired” (1 Cor. 12:18). The metaphor is not about abilities; it’s about roles, functions, ministries.44

It is Hultgren, however, who makes an observation uncommon in spiritual gifts literature. Hultgren points out that the scriptures speak of ministry within the body of Christ going in two directions: the members’ care of the body, and the body’s care of the members.

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Hultgren asserts that churches are quick to promote the former (the exhortation in Rom. 12 that members have gifts and they ought to use them), while slower to promote the latter (the exhortation in 1 Cor. 12:14-26 that members are not to consider certain body parts useless, but to treat the weaker, less honorable, unpresentable parts, as especially indispensable and honorable with special modesty.)

“Our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving great honor to the parts that lacked it,” says 1 Cor. 12:24. When spiritual gifts are understood as spiritual-abilities (strengths, talents), churches are inclined to do the opposite, to give special treatment and favor to those members whose gifts are most respected (the Greek word for “honor” refers to high-standing and decorum) while ignoring “weaker” members (the Greek word for “weaker” refers to those demonstrating limitations due to illness or age as opposed to spiritual weakness or immaturity). As a culture, Americans have difficulty valuing and honoring those with “disabilities.” The more extraordinary a person’s ability, the more highly a person is valued.

When spiritual gifts are seen as abilities, and the body of Christ prizes its members’ abilities and usefulness to the body, it is impossible for the body to envision a place for disabilities and to treat those members with special modesty, as indispensable and honorable, as Paul admonishes:

The emphasis of Rom 12 (that members should care for the body) is heard frequently in churches far and wide, but that of 1 Cor. 12 (that the body should care for its members) is not. And when that is the case, only one side of the body of Christ imagery is being looked at and heeded.46

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46 Ibid., 131.
Jeff Imbach makes the following observation relating spiritual gifts and weakness:

Our spiritual gifts are more than our successes. The apostle Paul gets to the heart of spiritual gifts in his words, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). The gift is not so much the activity but the way the Spirit is revealed. The Spirit is manifest both in our strengths and in our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).47

The word “manifestations,” which has been translated from the Greek word *phanerosis* literally means bringing-to-light or disclosure. As Imbach puts it, “the way the Spirit is revealed.”

Berding aligns with Imbach in saying that “the spiritual-abilities view suggests that service should flow out of our strengths; Paul says that sometimes—though not always—we’re called to minister out of weakness.”48 When “manifestation” is understood as “the way the Spirit is revealed,” Berding suggests at least three reasons why God might want to manifest himself through human weaknesses as well as strengths:

1. God refuses Paul’s prayers to eliminate a “thorn in the flesh,” which Paul believes has been given to him to keep him from getting conceited. He instead tells Paul that his power is perfected in weakness.49

2. It gives God an opportunity to do something in us, instead of merely through us.

3. It causes us to radically trust and depend on God in ways we do not when we serve with a sense of strength.50

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49 2 Cor. 12:9.

Blackaby and King add a practical implication to Berding’s argument. If Christ-followers only serve in ministries for which they have predetermined they have the abilities, strengths, or “spiritual gifts,” they will eliminate themselves from vast areas of service. In taking such an approach, they avoid placing themselves in radical dependence on God and miss discovering what God might do through them beyond the abilities, or disabilities, they currently perceive themselves to possess:

Some people say, “God will never ask me to do something that I can’t do.” I have come to the place in my life that, if the assignment I sense God is giving me is something I know I can handle, I know it probably is not from God. The kind of assignments God gives in the Bible are always God-sized. They are always beyond what people can do, because He wants to demonstrate His nature, His strength, His provision, and His kindness to His people and a watching world. . . .

. . . What our world is often seeing in our day is a devoted, committed Christian serving God. But they are not seeing . . . anything happening that can only be explained in terms of the activity of God. Why? Because we are not attempting anything that only God can do. 51

Unwillingness to risk and experiment with how God might supernaturally minister through us beyond our perceived abilities, effectively “ties God’s hands.” It limits the Spirit’s activities through Christ’s followers, and further, it limits what the world is able to see of Jesus.

Hybels discovered a similar phenomenon among his Willow Creek members who became paralyzed looking for the “perfect spot.” Searching for the “perfect spot” may not only be motivated by a fear of lack of ability, but also by the desire to excuse oneself from ministry one simply does not want to do. Both are avoidance mechanisms that will ultimately interfere with the Christ-follower obeying Christ’s call to certain types of service.

**Conclusion**

In summary, spiritual gifts discovery programs and tools have gone a long way to involve all members of Christ’s body in ministry. We have seen, however, that 1) the assumption that people need to “discover their gifts” before serving in ministry has been less practically beneficial and more a confusing distraction, 2) modern spiritual gifts discovery assessments are viewed as authoritative but lack psychometric validity, 3) there is no actual biblical mandate to discover one’s spiritual gifts, and 4) at the most basic level, popular authors have not taken care to biblically define spiritual gifts in the first place. When spiritual gifts are seen only as abilities, it discounts the biblical evidence that God works through individuals’ weaknesses.

Popularly touted benefits of spiritual gifts discovery to Christ-followers, both individually and collectively have missed the point. Personal fulfillment as a motivator for discovering one’s gifts is ultimately self-serving. Spiritual gifts discovery programs have not envisioned or encouraged the use of “spiritual gifts” outside the church in Kingdom ministry. Even though the church is close to five centuries past the Reformation, when most people—churched and unchurched alike—hear the word “ministry,” they still think of select services, performed by a select group of people, for a select group of people, often inside the walls of a select building. They still connect “spiritual gifts” with Church ministry.
SECTION 4

SUMMARY OF THESIS: HOLY SPIRIT–EMPOWERED KINGDOM MINISTRY
Chapter 8
The Holy Spirit in the World

Introduction

The spiritual gifts discovery movement, originally prompted by the charismatic renewal movement in the 1970s, was a robust attempt to return ministry to all God’s people. Yet, the movement failed to see the Holy Spirit at work beyond gifting individuals and the church with charismata to serve itself. It also failed to see the Holy Spirit as the source of strength Christ-followers need to continue Jesus’ Kingdom ministry in their everyday world.

This project’s proposed solution looks to reorient the church, whether house church or institutionalized church, toward being directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue Jesus’ Kingdom ministry. Chapter 8 will focus on the Holy Spirit’s rightful place in Kingdom ministry, a place often overlooked by the modern Church. A concept of re-klericalization will be developed and shown to be a better alternative than dismantling and declericalizing the institutionalized church. “Spiritual gifts” will now be understood as ministries the Holy Spirit executes through believers not only for the common good of the body of Christ, but also to make Jesus’ ministry tangible to the world God loves. A more comprehensive biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit’s missionary agenda will reveal that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world both independently of the body of Christ, as well as through it, to embody Jesus’ reign.
The final chapter will summarize the thesis of this paper—going back to the original problem—from this perspective.

Recovering the Kleros

Some, like Frank Viola, would argue that the only way to return ministry to all God’s people is to simply abolish the clergy class and the ordination process—a process referred to as declericalization. From Viola’s perspective in his recent book Reimagining Church,

. . . [T]he clergy profession is little more than a one-size-fits-all blending of administration, psychology, and oratory that’s packaged into one position for religious consumption. As such, the sociological role of clergy . . . has few points of contact with anything or anyone in the New Testament.¹

He goes on to quote Christian Smith who calls the clergy profession “fundamentally self-defeating”: “Clergy become to their congregations like parents whose children never grow up.”² While this may describe the dynamics within some local church systems, it is not necessarily inevitable.

The point is to empower laypeople to do the work of the kingdom, but simply demoting the clergy could leave a void of theological knowledge and depth within a congregation.

The Greek word kleros, from which the word clergy is derived occurs in Col. 1:12, Eph. 1:11, and Gal. 3:29. In these verses kleros, meaning the “appointed or endowed” ones, refers not just to leaders but to all of God’s people. An alternative to declericalizing would be “re-klericalizing” (a term the author coins) the whole laos—the people of God or the body of

¹ Viola, 161.

² Ibid., 163.
Re-klericalizing would mean recovering the biblical meaning of *kleros* and returning the church to its original constitution: “a people without laity, in the usual sense of that word, but full of clergy, in the true sense of that word—endowed, commissioned and appointed by God to continue God's own service and mission in the world.” In arguing that Paul refused to draw distinctions between holy and common people, Banks reiterates Stevens and others’ conclusion: both words clergy and laity did not come into Christian usage until the third century. Re-klericalization would not only mean a total recovery of the word *kleros*, but also the biblical word *laos*. This would be no small feat; Stevens illustrates the sense of inferiority and negativity the word “lay” has historically come to assume in contrast to the word “clergy.” As the word “lay” has evolved from *laos*, the biblical meaning has been all but lost:

Depending on the specific church context ‘lay’ is defined by *function* (does not administer the Word and sacraments), by *status* (does not have a ‘Rev.’), by *location* (serves primarily in the world), by *education* (is not theologically trained), by *remuneration* (is not full-time and paid), and by *lifestyle* (is not religious but occupied with secular life)—usually in terms of negatives!

Along with the efforts to recover these words, it would be desirable to recover the biblical allusion to ordination, or laying on of hands, and apply that to all *kleros* in the body of Christ. In this scenario, all God’s people would be ordained to the specific ministries to which Holy Spirit has endowed, commissioned, and appointed them, both inside the body of Christ and outside in the world to show forth God’s reign.

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4 Banks, 134.

5 Ibid., 24-5.
Recovering the vital, biblical function of those members considered clergy in certain traditions is key to the re-klerification of the church. Eph. 4:11-16 affirms that some members of the body of Christ have functions designed to equip the rest of God’s people for their for their ministries. A key responsibility of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, is to truthfully convey God’s revelation and mobilize God’s people for Kingdom ministry as they are equipped with a hopefully complete and correct knowledge of God’s revelation. In 2 Tim. 2:14-19 Paul urges Timothy to “correctly handle the word of truth” because failure to do so causes one to become more and more ungodly, and as one wanders away from the truth, one can destroy the faith and witness of others. The negative side effects arising from the development of a distinct clergy class have been discussed at length, but nevertheless a continual need remains for safeguards in respect to heresy. Teaching and preaching the truth remains a primary function of those God has assigned to equip the body for ministry.

While postmodernists debate over what constitutes truth, Jesus indicates there is objective truth in his person and his teaching that Christ-followers must heed and preserve. Jesus calls himself “the truth” (John 14:6) and prefaces over eighty sayings throughout all four gospels with “I tell you the truth”:

Because Christianity’s historic truth claims rest on authoritative scriptures that speak of the objective reality of God’s redemptive acts in history, especially Jesus Christ, objective revealed truth is an inherent Christian doctrine. Consequently, despite contemporary disparagement of the concept, heresy represents the very real error of departure from the truth.6

The need for some members of the body of Christ to be thoroughly knowledgeable of the whole of scripture, and as teachers and/or preachers, to equip the rest of the members with an

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adequate knowledge of the truth therein, is timeless and imperative in humanity’s fallen condition. Theological education is an important element of training those for whom being guardians of the truth is part of their equipping ministry.\(^7\)

The dependency on clergy that Smith and Viola condemn occurs when nurturing spiritual maturity is understood exclusively as a teaching/preaching endeavor and fails to include equipping \((\text{katantesomen})\) God’s people for works of service \((\text{ergon diakonias})\), which are the biblical responsibilities of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.\(^6\) Eph. 4:16 concludes this passage with “the whole body . . . grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.” The whole body matures as every single member does his or her \(\text{energeian}\), meaning “work, operation, or activity.” All members mature as they are mobilized in ministry.

There are, in this “body” imagery, important implications for not only church ministry, but also kingdom ministry. As Hultgren says,

\begin{quote}
It seems at first that whenever Paul speaks of the body of Christ, the matter at hand is one that is “internal” to the church, not one that has an “external” dimension. Yet it is by means of his body that the risen Christ relates to the world. It is not necessary to adopt the view that the body of Christ is an “extension of the incarnation” in time and space. But one can claim, nevertheless, that it is through that body that Christ continues to relate to the world. For it is through his body, the church on earth, that Christ continues to be known. To be sure, he is in no way confined to his body. But it is by means of his body that he has an earthly existence. . . . The body continues to function in the world, as each of its members assumes his or her vocation (i.e. his or her calling to faith and discipleship) in daily life.\(^9\)
\end{quote}

Equipping for ministry does not just mean equipping the other members for ministry inside the body of Christ, but also equipping members to serve as Christ’s ministering body in the

\(^7\) 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13-14.

\(^8\) Eph. 4:11-12.

\(^9\) Hultgren, 131.
world, including, and importantly, the places members practice their vocations. Devadatta shares a similar vision, although with a communal understanding:

Ministry as defined in the Bible is simply the people of God doing good within society in the name of Christ. Its purpose is to regain in simple and profound ways the original goodness of God’s creation. This can only be done when the community is communally equipped or prepared for works of service.

The church is called to the unique task of shaping people to be servants. It is not a political organization nor a social club, but a community that lives in service to others. . . .

The service of the church in the world will be dynamic and multifaceted, depending on the church’s ability to listen and obey the voice of God in its midst.

Karkkainen, Gillespie, Neill, and Weber and others all envision a place for specialized equippers inside the body of Christ, who prepare and build up the rest of the members for their specialized service as members of Christ’s ministering body in the world. In Karkkainen’s perspective, God has assigned some people to specialize in work in the world and some to specialize in work in the church; both, he says, should take responsibility to serve in both the world and the church. Work in the church should not be considered superior, or more spiritual, than work in the world. Depending on one’s Holy Spirit appointed ministry, one may invest the majority of their time in one arena or the other.

Neill and Weber suggest the following role for those classified as clergy in mobilizing their fellow laity for their work in the world. The following applies to any who specialize in equipping ministries within the church:

If the Church is ever again to penetrate this alienated world and to claim it for the name of Christ, its only resources are in its convinced and converted laymen. There


11 Karkkainen, 154.
are vast areas, geographical and spiritual, which the ordained minister can hardly penetrate; the laymen are already there, and are there everyday.12

. . . [Laymen] alone can bring Christian judgment to bear upon all the issues of life in the spheres of industry and commerce, scientific research and social organization, and all the other activities, which make up the workaday world. Their meeting-points in the secular world can become real opportunities for the witness of a living Church in the midst of the busy world’s life. . . .

. . . The ordained clergy [are] set apart to strengthen and teach, to encourage and unite, all the several witnesses in their various callings whose ministry is set in the heart of the secular world’s manifold activity. 13

If the whole laos (people of God as Christ’s body), including those currently classified as clergy, understood and engaged in their roles as Neill and Weber here envision, Christ’s body could make a hitherto unprecedented impact in the world. In this scenario, those who specialize in working inside the church work diligently behind the scenes, educating, strengthening, and equipping the rest of the laos for their Kingdom ministry on the frontlines in the world. The paramount ministry of the laos is their work in the world, not their ministry inside the church. The laos, the people of God, both clergy and lay, must help one another to be “liberated from the captivity of the institution turning in on itself.”14

Ordination takes a meaningful place in this scenario, but it now becomes all-inclusive. Although ordination has hitherto been associated with the acknowledgement of leadership gifts for ministry inside the institutionalized church, in the Scripture’s allusions to ordination occur on occasions of sending out for ministry. This essentially missional nuance, noted by Hinson in Chapter 6, makes the practice of ordination potentially more relevant to Kingdom ministry than church ministry, for which it has traditionally been used.

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13 Ibid., 382, 388.

14 Vos, 153.
Since there is biblical support for a simple ritual or symbol confirming a Christ-follower’s Holy Spirit–given appointment to ministry, the church could instead ordain all members to their respective Holy Spirit-appointed ministries in the church and world. Ordination would consist of the community publicly recognizing a member’s appointment and laying hands him or her in prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit’s empowerment.

At this point in church history, it would be more empowering to the whole 

laos to elevate and ordain all those currently classified as non-clergy, rather than eliminate ordination and demote those currently classified as clergy. James Dunn suggests as much: “Until we count ‘ordination’ of Sunday School teachers and distributors of church flowers as no different in essence from ‘ordination’ of an elder or bishop, we cannot claim to be functioning as the body of Christ.”\(^{15}\)

Ordaining all members of the body of Christ for their God-given ministry appointments as 
kleros would recognize and empower all the 

laos for their unique ministries in both church and world, without disempowering those already classified as clergy in their much needed, God-given function as equippers.

\textit{The Priority of Holy Spirit Over Institution}

While re-klericalization of the whole 

laos would be the biblical ideal, it is unlikely traditions having formalized layers of authority in place for centuries could suddenly be convinced to completely dismantle their clergy-lay distinctions and hierarchical structures today. On the other hand, it is always possible for any tradition to earnestly, openly seek the Holy Spirit’s will anew in terms of its structure and overall operations. Any tradition can also

\(^{15}\) Ogden, \textit{Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God}, 267.
open itself to intentionally identifying the specific charismata residing amongst members, and ordain each member to their particular function in the way described above.

But in order to do this, churches with ordained clergy and officers must restore primacy to the Holy Spirit. Ronald Fung, who argues for harmonizing the mutual relations of function, gift, and office, concludes that the Holy Spirit should take priority:

It is the charisma, not the office, that creates the ministry; the office is but the channel through which the office-bearer may exercise the given charisma for a particular function; and the church’s appointment to office (where such is involved) is but a sign of recognizing a person’s spiritual gifts and a response to God’s will made known in the bestowing of those gifts. In this sense, it is correctly said that “all order is an “afterwards”, an attempt to follow what God has already designed.”

Likewise, Pinnock maintains the church can never avoid institutionalization altogether, but must constantly remain open to the workings of the Holy Spirit and give the operations of the Spirit primacy above all structures and offices:

Any pattern of collective behavior that becomes habitual will become in some ways institutional. . . . The church needs structures in order to continue. The main thing from a biblical point of view is that institutional elements be functional and flexible. . . . Charisma is what the church is about and points to what the church essentially is. Crucially, therefore, we must allow for openness to promptings of the Holy Spirit and give the Spirit primacy over structures and offices, even though they too are Spirit-given.

Paying attention to the promptings and charisms of the Holy Spirit and giving those primacy over all existing structures and offices is much easier said than done. In practice, today’s institutionalized church tends to rely largely on its official human leadership for the effective implementation and oversight of systematized structures and programs to keep the well-oiled church machine running effectively. Though some traditions place more emphasis

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17 Pinnock, 161-2.
on attending to the Holy Spirit than others, the human tendency remains to depend much on offices and structures, and little on the filling and leading of the Holy Spirit for ministry. The challenge, as Pinnock implies, is for a church to let Christ, through the Holy Spirit, truly run the church, even if is through existing offices and structures the church has in place. If the church’s reigning priority is maintaining a smooth running machine, the priority must be replaced with the Holy Spirit’s priority of seeking first the Kingdom of God—getting God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven.

For the Church to continue Jesus’ ministry in the world, she must understand the person of the Holy Spirit, appreciate the scope and purpose of the Holy Spirit’s work, and align herself with the work that is already going on.

Commonly Recognized Work of the Holy Spirit

The Church tends to forget that the Holy Spirit of God is an eternal member of the Triune God rather than a late addition to the Trinity. The Holy Spirit did not just show up for the first time at Pentecost solely to minister sanctification to individual Christ-followers and distribute gifts to benefit the Church. Some evangelicals, in particular, have a tendency to perceive the Holy Spirit’s work in this way. Yet the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of the universe, and has been active at the cosmic level ever since—individually of God’s human agents and the Church. At the most basic level,

While pantheism (identifying God with the world) is obviously to be rejected, a Trinitarian view leads us to emphasize the Spirit of God as his presence in creation. When St. Paul, speaking to the Athenians, quoted approvingly the words of a Greek poet, “In Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), he was affirming the truth that God’s Spirit is immediately present and active at every level of creation in which we move.18

Distinct from God the Father and God the Son, it has proven difficult for the church to conceptualize and, moreover, personify God the Holy Spirit. Though the Nicene Creed established that the Triune God is one essence/nature in three persons, making the Holy Spirit eternally coexistent with, and equal to, God the Father and God the Son, in the majority of church traditions, the Holy Spirit has remained the least familiar and least spoken about member of the Godhead. It has only been recently that the Spirit gained the Church’s attention, across all ecclesial traditions, in connection with spiritual gifts.

The following is a non-exhaustive review of the Holy Spirit’s work in the Bible. In the Old Testament, although not yet presented as a semi-independent divine personality, the Spirit is an expression of God’s power, breathing life into creation, speaking through the prophets, and presently enabling the laos for God’s Kingdom. The Spirit is mentioned working in specific ways through various individuals on multiple occasions:

- At creation (Gen. 1:2)
- Equipping God’s people for service (e.g. craftsmanship—Exod. 31:3; leadership—Judg. 3:10; physical prowess—Judg. 14:6)
- Inspiring and foretelling the Messiah through the prophets (e.g. Mic. 3:8; Ezek. 2:2; Is 61:1)
- Indwelling and empowering leaders (e.g. Num. 11:17; 1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Sam. 23:2; Ps. 139:7)

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is presented in a more personified form—most notably by Jesus himself in the lengthiest explanation of the Spirit’s ministry found in John 14-16—and credited with being God’s power behind a wide range of activities:
• Work in Jesus’ life:
  o Conceives Jesus in Mary’s womb (Luke 1:35)
  o Comes upon Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:21-22)
  o Anoints Jesus for ministry/mission (Luke 4:18-19)

• Five key ministries to individual Christ-followers:
  o Conviction (John 16:8)
  o Regeneration (Titus 3:5)
  o Indwelling (1 Cor. 6:19-20)
  o Baptism (1 Cor. 12:13)

• Ministry as paraclete (comforter, counselor, advocate), helping Christ-followers:
  o Be assured of salvation (Rom. 8:16)
  o Understand the scriptures (1 Cor. 2:9-10, 13)
  o Understand God’s ways (Eph. 1:17-18)
  o To pray (Rom. 8:26-27)
  o Be strong in faith and obedience (Eph. 3:16-19)
  o As a guide (Rom. 8:14)

• Ministry within the body of Christ:
  o Arrives in dramatic power to fill first believers at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4)
  o Empowers church to witness of the good news to all the earth (Acts 1:8)
  o Distributes ministry gifts of grace to the church (1 Cor. 12:4, 7)
  o Creates and maintains unity in the church (Eph. 4:3-4)  

In this survey of direct references to the Holy Spirit in the scriptures, it appears that much of the Holy Spirit’s work is on behalf of God’s chosen people in the Old Testament and Jesus and his followers in the New Testament, but this does not tell the whole story. Pentecostal theologian Jeffrey Snell, sets out to meet two goals: to expand traditional pneumatology, which tends to limit the Holy Spirit’s work to the inner-person, and explore the role of the Holy Spirit in equipping the church for ministry in the world. Snell advocates that the Spirit must be “additionally perceived as an equipper and empowerer to engage the world, instead of solely as an agent specializing in the conservation of individual piety and

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the conservation of sanctification.”

Gallagher also notes the church’s tendency to see the Holy Spirit’s work as limited to work within Christian structures:

Christians believe in the glorified Christ who poured out his Holy Spirit upon all who belong to him (Rom. 8:9). They confess that the Spirit is working throughout the world in churches and on the mission field. However, they often restrict the Spirit’s work to within the walls of the church and the fences of the mission compound. Hendrikus Berkof states, “The impact of the Spirit as the active presence of Jesus Christ in the world is far wider than we are aware.”

The next section will the review the Holy Spirit’s work in the world independent of the Spirit’s work through God’s people, individually or corporately.

*The Holy Spirit’s Mission and Ministry outside the Body of Christ*

In recent decades, the Church’s enthusiasm over spiritual gifts has been accompanied by a nearsighted focus on a few “gifts passages” that emphasize building up the body. Snell expands this limited understanding:

There are those gifts of the Spirit which do not always minister to Christians; that is, the object of the ministry depends on the need that the gift is given to meet. Evangelism, for example, is exercised exclusively among the unbelieving. The gift of healing is exercised among the Christian and non-Christian alike . . .

Even the gift of tongues, according to 1 Cor. 14:22, is “a sign not for believers but for unbelievers.” . . .

It makes sense, then, that the ministry of gifts of the Holy Spirit are not limited to the household of faith because a brief consideration of the activity of the Holy Spirit will demonstrate that it is not limited only to the sphere of the individual believer or even the Church, but extends to the whole creation.

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21 Gallagher, 17.

22 Snell, 47-8.
To understand the Holy Spirit’s ministry outside the body of Christ we must look beyond scripture passages that explicitly contain the body of Christ metaphor. As Banks notes,

All these references to the “body” . . . speak only of the internal relations between Christ and the community, and between members of the community. . . . This does not mean that individual members of the community lack responsibilities towards the world around them but simply means that the metaphor of the “body” is never used to refer to such.23

When we observe the Holy Spirit’s ministry throughout the whole of scripture, we discover the enormous breadth of the Spirit’s activity beyond the body of Christ, to complete God’s mission throughout the whole earth. The Holy Spirit is on a wholesale, creation-wide redemptive mission to restore the whole creation to its original glory.24

Robert Gallagher draws on Geoffrey Bromiley’s work to illustrate the Spirit’s activity at this primal level,

. . . [A]nything that is good and noble in humanity is due to the result of the Holy Spirit. . . . sinful human beings are still God’s creation made in the image of God. Though people are marred by sin, vestiges remain of God’s goodness and sovereignty. As such, fallen humankind can still do things that are helpful. Poetry, art, music, scientific discoveries and technologies are all evidence that the Holy Spirit is still enabling fallen humanity.25

Bromiley is not negating a person’s need to be born again in Christ. He goes on to say that although “the Spirit of God has left his mark on humanity created in the image of God . . . a person needs to receive the new life of the Spirit by believing in Jesus. . . . Eternal life is the breath of the Spirit into a person’s life, after he or she has made a conscious decision to

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24 Rom. 8:8-23.

follow the Lord Jesus.”

Upon the establishment of the believer’s personal, living relationship with God through belief in and conscious committal to the lordship of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up full residence in the believer (Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:1-27; 1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Accordingly, the Holy Spirit is actively preparing humans who are out of relationship with God to encounter the living God. Often the person does not consciously recognize the Spirit’s work in their life until after they have entered into a relationship with Christ. This aspect of the Spirit’s mission extends well beyond the Church’s role of witnessing and evangelizing:

God’s interaction with the world is greater than the activity of the missionary church. . . .

. . . God is busy in his concern for the unchurched. . . . The Holy Spirit is at work preparing people for the gospel. God’s Spirit comes to human beings and can be in them. The action of the Spirit opens up human beings for himself, making them ready and capable to receive the good news.

There are several biblical examples of the Holy Spirit preparing people for the arrival of, or an encounter with, Jesus:

- Luke 1:15, 41: John is filled with the Holy Spirit before birth.
- Luke 1-2: The Spirit came upon Mary (1:35), Elizabeth (1:41), and Simeon (2:25), all Jews at the time.
- Luke 2:30-32: The Jewish Messiah was not just for the Jews alone; God’s purpose of universal salvation had always included the Gentiles.

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26 Ibid., 32.
27 Acts 11:15-17.
28 Gallagher, 21-3.
• Acts 4:25: Early Christians acknowledge the Spirit’s historical activity in Old Testament times, saying, “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David.”

• Acts 7:51: The Spirit spoke through prophets who Israel continually rejected and persecuted—Stephen confronts the Sanhedrin on this.


• In general, the Spirit continually worked through Israel’s rebellious, backsliding history, confronting them time and again by speaking through the prophets. The Spirit can work this same way with any godless person intended for God’s purposes.

There is also a clear example of the Holy Spirit’s work amongst people of other religions in the story of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10. Using the dramatic means of both an angelic visitation and a supernatural vision, the Holy Spirit was busy preparing the God-fearing Gentile Cornelius to meet Peter and visa versa. Cornelius and all the rest of the Gentiles who gathered in his home would come to faith and receive the Holy Spirit.

Gallagher notes the goal of the Holy Spirit’s work is always to bring the person to faith in Jesus. In preparing people to encounter Jesus, the Holy Spirit is at once winsome and jealous:

Luke may give some indication that he sees the Holy Spirit working in non-Christians, but it is always in the context of leading them to Jesus. This is always accomplished through repentance of sins and faith in Christ. The narrator of Luke-Acts does not view other religions as having any value in themselves, nor is he concerned with showing the Spirit’s relationship with humanity outside faith in the Savior. The Spirit is seen working in people of other persuasions, as they are on their way towards accepting the truth that is in Christ Jesus.29

29 Ibid., 33.
The point here is that the Holy Spirit enables people who have not yet entered into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus to do helpful things. Even John Calvin was willing to “grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in [humanity].”\(^{30}\) Calvin’s “total depravity” doctrine does not mean:

1. that depraved people cannot do or do not perform actions that are good in either humanity’s or God’s sight, but no such action can favor with God for salvation;

2. that fallen humanity has no conscience which judges between good and evil for him, but that conscience has been affected by the fall so that it cannot be a safe and reliable guide;

3. that people indulge in every form of sin or in any sin to the greatest extent possible.\(^{31}\)

Yet, “total depravity” doctrine has led some Christians to relegate all good and beauty that is not explicitly “Christian” to the evil, secular world, thereby missing opportunities to recognize and encourage what the Spirit is doing among non-Christians. All human acts of helpfulness and beautiful creativity are evidence that God’s reign is still overcoming evil to some degree.

With that broader understanding, the Church is in a better position to understand its role as agent of God’s mission on earth which is “nothing other than bringing all things, and supremely, all people of the earth under the dominion and headship of Jesus Christ. . . . To say that Church is the agent of God’s mission on earth is equivalent to saying the Church is the agent of the Kingdom of God,”\(^{32}\) empowered by the Holy Spirit who is already at work in

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\(^{32}\) Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), 13.
the world. The maturity and building up of the individual believer or corporate body of Christ is not an end unto itself; the body of Christ is sent out to continue Jesus’ ministry in the world, to “witness to the character and virtues of God’s reign.”

The Body of Christ’s Continuation of Jesus’ Kingdom Ministry

Until recently, the Church has been slow to recognize the Holy Spirit’s wider work in the world independent of the Church. The Church has also been slow to promote the application of Spirit-given charismata in the world. As a result, Christ-followers continue to undermine Jesus’ visibility to the rest in the world still waiting to receive and enter God’s Kingdom.

In his groundbreaking Body Life, Ray Stedman was originally very clear about the church’s role in the world:

Many are asking today, “Where is Jesus Christ at work in our world? How does he touch the problems of society in this twentieth century?” The answer is that he is at work exactly as he was at work in his lifetime on earth, doing precisely the same thing. In the days of his flesh, he did his ministry through one solitary earthly physical body. He is doing the same work now through a corporate, complex body which exists around the world and permeates and penetrates every level of society. It is called the Church, the body of Christ . . .

We have seen that he has endowed his corporate body with an array of spiritual gifts . . .

These are clearly stated as: (1) unto the work of the ministry; and (2) unto the building up of the body of Christ. The gifts are to be useful in two realms, the world and the church. We must continually remember that the work of the ministry is to the world. The church exists as God’s instrument to reach the world.

Although Stedman’s original conviction that “the work of the ministry is to the world,” the world has all but disappeared in the subsequent spiritual gifts/lay mobilization literature

33 Ibid., 13.
34 Stedman, 93-4.
produced in the wake of the charismatic renewal movement, the missional movement is encouraging a renewed interest in this mandate. Stedman’s original emphasis is once again poised to make it to the fore.

As Stedman claims, the mission of the Church is to make Jesus visible in the world by being Christ’s ministering body in the world:

It is clearly God’s intention that through the true church the world might see Jesus Christ at work. The world needs his ministry desperately, but it was never intended that worldlings should come to the church to find Christ. The church should be in the world. It is only thus that the world will understand that Christ is not dead, is not gone, and is not inactive. Jesus Christ is not in some remote corner of the universe (heaven), nor has he left his people here to struggle on and do the best they can until he comes back again. This was never the divine intent nor is it the New Testament pattern. Christ is alive and has been at work in human society for twenty centuries, just as he said he would be: *Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age* (Matt. 28:20).  

Stedman clearly outlines the body of Christ’s ministry by going straight to the same passage as Stearns previously discussed in the Kingdom Ministry section in Chapter 4 (see page 33—Jesus’ own inaugural ministry speech in Luke 4:16-21—noting five fundamentals to Jesus’ ministry:

1. The Spirit anointed Jesus for his ministry (v. 18)

2. The Spirit anointed Jesus to preach good news to the poor—evangelism aimed at poor in spirit, whether they be poor or rich physically and materially (v. 18).

3. The Spirit anointed Jesus to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind (proclaim liberty and light) (v. 18).

4. The Spirit anointed Jesus to set at liberty those who are oppressed (v. 18). (Stedman understands oppression distinctly from captivity; it includes a demonic element that only prayer will drive out. Mark 9:29)

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35 Ibid., 94.
5. The Spirit anointed Jesus to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord—salvation is possible now (v. 19). Stedman summarizes, “There is the work of the ministry: evangelizing, teaching, praying, explaining the times. That is the task of the church in the world.” Some understand Jesus’ speech more literally and less metaphorically than Stedman, but Stedman’s practical point is well taken: the work of ministry that occurred through Jesus during his earthly ministry is now meant to occur through the body of Christ.

Moreover, Jesus says his disciples will do even greater works than he has done “because I go to the Father” (John 14:12). Stedman suggests here what John means by “greater works”:

When Jesus went back to the Father he sent back the Holy Spirit who would reproduce the life of Jesus within the believer. Thus the church can do throughout the ages greater works than the Son of God did when he was here in the days of his flesh, for it is really not the church (or the individual Christian) doing them, but they are being done by a risen, ascended Lord through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the distributor and enabler of the Christ followers’ ministries in the world every bit as much as He is the distributor and enabler of members’ spiritual ministries inside the body of Christ. The “greater [works] than these” Jesus speaks about in John 14:12 refer directly back to the “works,” in some translations “miracles,” he mentions in the previous verse, John 14:11. These works, or miracles, would frequently include healings, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Upon Jesus’ departure, the Holy Spirit assumes the same preaching and healing ministry of Jesus, acting through members of Christ’s body. The more members of the body

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36 Ibid., 98-102.

37 Ibid., 103.

38 Ibid., 98.
of Christ perceive themselves as indwelt by the risen Spirit of Jesus, the more they can see themselves empowered to incarnate Jesus’ ministry in the world. James Shelton explains “In Acts, people who were not Apostles function as prophets and miracle-working deacons. . . . Luke would have us believe the Spirit’s agenda for Jesus was continued by the disciples empowered by the Holy Spirit. . . . There is no need to drive a pneumatic wedge between Jesus and the Church.”

Stephen Bevans also challenges us to think beyond the standard conception of the Spirit in Johannine terms, that is, God sends Jesus who sends the Spirit. Bevans suggests instead that it is always the Holy Spirit who meets a person first, before they meet Jesus:

I have come to see that it is indeed the Spirit that we know first, who precedes Jesus not only in our own lives but in the history of the world and the cultures that have not known him. . . . This change in perspective, emphasizing the Spirit’s chronological and experiential priority, has profound implications for the theology of Christian mission. . . .

. . . If the Spirit is the first way that God sends and is sent, the Spirit’s activity becomes the foundation of the church’s own missionary nature.

Awareness of the Spirit’s preparation in people on their way to accepting Jesus is extremely important. If Christ-followers take the perspective that the Holy Spirit has already been preparing the person (even unconsciously) to whom they were about to minister to meet Jesus, they can be alert, looking for evidence of this. They are then in a position to discover some way to connect to the Spirit’s work. They can ask the Holy Spirit to help them discern the particular way God wants them to make Jesus visible to that person at that moment as a ministering member of the body of Christ.

Christ-followers should be pointedly affirming any evidence they see of God’s Kingdom and taking the next step of inviting those who do not enjoy a relationship with God

39 Shelton, 222, 225.

40 Bevans, 102.
through Jesus to fully, consciously enter God’s Kingdom and receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Hendikus Berkhof describes the perils of Christ-followers maintaining a Christian "pessimism of culture":

The average Christian does not expect to see any positive signs of God’s reign in the world. He believes that the world only becomes worse and races in the direction of the antichrist. . . . The average Christian is not aware of the presence of the Kingdom in the world today. . . . Prevalent in our churches is a bad kind of pietism . . . which limits the power of Christ to his personal relationship to the individual believer, and which sees no connection between Christ and world events, or between Christ and daily work. This leads to an ungrateful blindness for the signs of Christ’s reign in the present. Expressions such as “we live on the edge of a volcano,” “it can’t last this way much longer,” “humanity is steadily becoming worse,” “the end of time is near” are very popular in Christian circles. And they believe this pessimism of culture . . . is completely in agreement with Christian faith.\(^4\)

Members of Christ’s body should minister to non-Christian people with this attitude:

As the Spirit works, so must the church. Since nothing is foreign to the Spirit, nothing need be foreign to the church. Since the Spirit pervades all things, so must the church. The task of the church is to be in the midst of history, to be partners in God’s creation, to be a living sign in its community of creation’s future. . . . The church’s mission, like God’s mission, arises out of passion for all that is and can be. It does not replace God’s mission, of course, but it points to and cooperates with God’s activity with all its heart.\(^4\)

Today’s missional church is in a position to emphasize the Holy Spirit’s missionary activities—activities that both precede the body of Christ and those that flow out of the body of Christ as it acts as Christ’s ministering body in the world.

**Conclusion**

The Holy Spirit has filled Christ-followers in order to carry out Jesus’ mission. At the same time, the Holy Spirit is also independently at work, preparing people to be receptive to


\(^4\) Bevans, 104.
meeting Jesus through encounters with Spirit-filled Christ-followers. The Spirit-filled body of Christ works as God’s vehicle, concurrently alongside the Holy Spirit. The Spirit also works independently to accomplish God’s mission, which is to establish God’s Kingdom bringing all people and all creation under the dominion and headship of Jesus Christ:

The community of believers—women and men who share and continue Jesus mission in the world—are, in Paul’s image, the body of Christ. As such, they continue to be the “face” of God’s Holy Mystery in history and to give concrete shape and focus to the creative, life-giving, challenging, renewing, uniting power of the Spirit that has always been loose in the world. It is as the body of Christ and the “face” of the Spirit that the church discovers its mission in the world. . . .

[In the words of John V. Taylor: “Our theology would improve if we thought more of the church being given to the Spirit than the Spirit being given to the church.”]

In Part III we have seen the limitations of materials and programs inspired by the charismatic movement beginning in the 1970s through the close of the twentieth century. This movement very effectively highlighted “the Spirit being given to the church.” The Holy Spirit was seen as given primarily for the personal sanctification of the individual believer and spiritual gifts were understood predominantly as abilities given by the Holy Spirit to bless individual believers and the body of Christ. We also saw that while simply dismantling and declericalizing the institutionalized church is one way to get rid of the clergy and release people from ineffective structures, re-klericalization is a better alternative. All God’s people would be ordained to the specific ministries to which Holy Spirit has endowed, commissioned, and appointed them, both inside the body of Christ and outside in the world to embody God’s Kingdom.

With a more comprehensive biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit’s missionary agenda, we have seen that “spiritual gifts” are better understood as ministries the Holy Spirit executes through believers not only for the common good of the body of Christ, but also to

43 Ibid., 103.
make Jesus visible to the world God loves. While the charismatic-renewal movement of the twentieth century focused on the Spirit being given to the church, the missional movement of the twenty-first century recognizes that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world both independently of the body of Christ, as well as through it, reaching out beyond itself to embody Jesus’ reign as a “church given to the Spirit.”
Chapter 9

Summary of Thesis

We began with the story of Brad and Christie, who wanted to minister in ways that would make God’s reign visible by responding to particular kinds of brokenness they observed in the world around them. Their well-intentioned church, however, effectively discouraged them from doing so. In general, the lay ministry movement of the latter half of the twentieth century with its vision to make “every member a minister” has oriented members toward ministry inside the body of Christ, without mobilizing them to be Christ’s ministering body in their everyday world.

Further, we’ve seen that this is a contemporary version of an ancient problem, a root problem that has endured almost since the Church’s infancy: the Church is ever bent on turning in on itself. In the same way Jesus was sent by the Father, so he sent his disciples to continue his ministry of giving visible form to God’s Kingdom. Christ’s followers were to carry on compassionately ministering in Jesus’ name and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, inviting people everywhere to receive and enter the Kingdom.

In less than three centuries, as the Church became institutionalized, ministry went behind closed doors. Dedicated church buildings and basilicas replaced more socially permeable house churches. Christians began living compartmentalized lives, one life at church, which was now the church building, and another life away from church. The kind of mutual ministry Christians practiced through hospitality and/or being bound as household units became outmoded. Actively tending to the welfare of brothers and sisters in Christ, or
the poor or marginalized they would encounter in their everyday world, became segregated from Christians’ private domestic spaces.

As dedicated church buildings rose, so did a class of professional leaders who acquired labeled “the clergy.” A small handful of members within the body of Christ came to be identified as the doers of ministry, while the majority assumed a spectator role. Recognition of Holy Spirit charismata faded, even became suspect, while power and authority came to reside in offices. Even the Reformation did not functionally achieve returning the priesthood to all God’s people. Churches have continued to rely on offices and structured governments to guide and empower their operations over the Holy Spirit. Ministry continued to be identified with what the clergy do on behalf of the church, rather than what all God’s people do, empowered by the Holy Spirit, on behalf of God’s Kingdom.

In the 1970s, an unprecedented new wave of enthusiasm for the Holy Spirit’s ministry and interest in spiritual gifts emerged. Spiritual gifts discovery was expected to be the key to finally attaining the priesthood of all believers. Return of all ministry to all believers seemed imminent. But although the Church made good progress in the last three decades, it has not taken things far enough. The emphasis centered on the benefits of spiritual gifts discovery to individuals and the body of Christ—on the “Spirit being given to the church.” Many Christians came to perceive themselves as ministers in the church, but still do not perceive themselves as priests who minister God’s presence and make God’s invisible Kingdom visible in their everyday world.

With the missional movement in full swing, and the Church’s attention once again on the Kingdom, the Church is poised to mobilize Christ-followers for Kingdom ministry. In order to do this, the Church will operate from the posture of “a church given to the Spirit.” A
church given to the Spirit understands the Holy Spirit’s missionary agenda and recognizes that “spiritual gifts” are better understood as ministries the Holy Spirit manifests through believers—not only for the common good of the body of Christ, but also to continue Jesus’ Kingdom ministry in the world God loves. A church given to the Spirit appreciates that the Holy Spirit is also at work independently of the church, preparing peoples’ hearts to receive and enter the Kingdom. A church given to the Spirit is discerning of the Spirit’s activity throughout all creation, and responsive to cooperate with that activity, ready to make God’s reign visible by ministering in Jesus’ name and the Spirit’s power.

At a primal level, a church given to the Spirit will have to give up control of itself, relinquishing its own strategies, and obeying the Spirit’s leading in illogical, counterintuitive, uncomfortable directions. It will have to “live by faith and not by sight,” to actively follow the unpredictable movement of the Spirit. It will have to trust that the Spirit will never contradict the other members of the Godhead, but is always acting in unison with them.

The Holy Spirit is fundamentally a missionary Spirit who is challenging the Church once again to give itself to the Spirit and let the Spirit, through Christ’s body, continue Jesus’ ministry, giving visible form to God’s Kingdom in the world. The church must mobilize Christ-followers outward for Kingdom ministry—service in Jesus’ name and the Spirit’s power—that embodies God’s Kingdom in the world they encounter every day.

\[44\text{ 2 Cor. 5:7.}\]
SECTION 5

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION
The attached artifact is a small group process designed to mobilize Christ-followers not only for their Spirit-appointed ministry inside the body of Christ, but also for their Spirit-given Kingdom ministry assignment—service in Jesus’ name and the Spirit’s power—that embodies God’s Kingdom in the world they encounter everyday.

Since the thesis lays great emphasis on Christians and their churches discovering a deeper reliance on the Holy Spirit’s direction and empowerment for ministry, several strategies have been incorporated into the curriculum:

1. The curriculum can be led by a facilitator; the small group does not require a teacher or Bible expert present. Questions can be answered in most part, by simple reference to biblical texts. Occasional commentary is supplied when necessary for an accurate, informed understanding.

   GOAL: participants will learn how to experience Jesus and the Spirit directly, as their Teacher (Matt. 28:8-10, John 14:25-26) and overcome their dependence on church professionals for their Christian education.

2. Today’s Christians are time-crunched. Most will not do advanced preparation for a small group Bible study. The content in these lessons can be covered completely during group time, the “homework” encouraged between lessons involves prayer and the practice of something learned.

   GOAL: participants will establish habits of prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit. They will actually grow in their responsiveness to the Spirit by experimenting with activities suggested at the end of each lesson.
3. Each lesson begins with “Sharing Stories.” The most powerful evidence of the Holy Spirit’s ongoing work is in the lives of Christian brothers and sisters we are in relationship with. Often this goes unnoticed and unreported.

   GOAL: Sharing stories of the Spirit’s work is a powerful encouragement to one another and heightens our awareness of the Spirit’s work in our own lives and others around us.

4. The heart of the lesson is scripture study and discussion.

   GOAL: God’s word is authoritative and transforming. Nothing replaces first hand exposure, and continued equipping in knowing what the biblical text is saying. Through reflection and healthy debate participants will observe how the Spirit is speaking through the text to individuals and the group.

5. Each lesson closes with a “Prayer and Application Activity.”

   GOAL: participants will move from conceptual learning to experiential learning as they follow up between lessons with specific suggestions for prayer and application directly related to that lesson. Prayer and experimenting with activities that require a step of faith is also imperative in practicing increasing reliance on the Holy Spirit.

6. Overall, the content will move participants from theological foundations of Kingdom ministry toward the practical outcome of mobilizing them in Kingdom ministry.

   GOAL: inspired by biblical study and a well formed vision of God’s Kingdom, Jesus’ ministry, the Holy Spirit’s ongoing activity in both church and world, and the Christ-follower’s place in all that, participants will each
discern their Spirit-appointed Kingdom ministry within their local church and local community.

7. Extra attention is given to the strength-in-weakness paradox, and the practice of discernment in Lessons 6 and 7, subjects that were neglected in spiritual gifts discovery programs of the past. Previous tools and programs focused on gifts as abilities/strengths and used spiritual gifts inventories in place of discernment.

   GOAL: participants will grow in reliance upon the Holy Spirit for direction and empowerment for ministry.

8. The study will conclude with a suggestion for a simple ordination of participants for their Holy Spirit given Kingdom ministry assignments. This small ceremony is meant to inculcate the participants priestly identity and symbolize the recovery of the kleros discussed in Chapters 6 and 8.

   GOAL: participant will gain an identity as “Kingdom priest” and participants’ group or local church will recognize, bless and affirm the particular way God has endowed, commissioned and appointed them, to be priests in their church and local community.
SECTION 6

ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION SHEET
Goals and Strategies

- Main goals for Artifact
  - Overall—Christ-followers are mobilized for Kingdom ministry, as well as church ministry
  - Artifact is a small group curriculum offering a discernment process
  - Group members telling of faith and ministry journeys is an integral part of discernment
  - Group members’ feedback and prayer is integral to discernment
  - Curriculum designed to be used by a “facilitator” versus a “teacher”; promotes participants experiencing Jesus as Teacher and Holy Spirit as minister both directly through the scripture readings and also through other group members during group time
  - Curriculum/small group process achieves its goals with minimal “homework” (which most people will not do outside of meeting time)
  - Goals of curriculum content:
    - User gains deeper understanding of the Kingdom and learns definition of Kingdom ministry
    - User gains perception of self as priest within God’s “Kingdom of priests”
    - User gains deeper understanding of mission and ministry of Holy Spirit
    - User learns biblical basis for new definition and approach to “spiritual gifts”
    - User learns alternate way to discern their Spirit-given ministry appointment without conventional “spiritual gifts tests”
    - User identifies places to “jump in” and serve, both inside local church and outside in local community
    - User is “ordained” by local church with a commissioning celebration, is “sent” and supported in ministry by group members

- A “beta version” of the artifact will be tested as follows:
  - It is designed to fit into a Bethany Activate quarter (10-12 weeks maximum)
  - An initial “pilot” will be offered at Bethany Community Church Fall, 2010

- Success will be measured as follows:
  - Number of users who complete study
  - The number of users who are equipped to actively discern their Holy-Spirit-given ministry assignments
  - Number of users who are placed in church and Kingdom ministries
  - Number of users who remain in those ministries for at least three months

- Ongoing use is expected to be maintained as follows:
  - Document who has gone through “Living Out the Kingdom Within”
  - Develop a tracking process for who is in what ministry (both inside church and outside in community)
**Audience**

- The intended user will be any Christ-follower who is a participant in a small group.
- The curriculum is not designed to be used individually.
- The curriculum is not designed for someone who is undecided about Jesus and the authority of scripture.
- The curriculum is a Bible study including very focused, practical prayer and application activities.
- Participants will be directed to experiment with new practices that will take them out of their comfort zone and promote reliance on the Holy Spirit in new ways, including listening to the Holy Spirit for direction and experiencing the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for ministry.
- Participants will identify and engage in their specific Holy Spirit given Kingdom ministry assignments in both church and world.

**Artifact Scope and Content**

- Content will be limited to 10 lessons, requiring no additional reading or homework.

**Budget**

- Initial printing will occur at Bethany Community Church for participants within the church.
- Bethany Community Church’s graphic design artist will be commissioned with determining an ideal size of booklet, designing an attractive cardstock cover, and converting text content according to Bethany’s printing style guide.

**Promotion**

- The artifact will initially be utilized in Bethany Community Church’s Fall 2010 church-wide Community Groups Initiative and will appear in a catalog and any additional promotional literature connected with that initiative.

**Standards of publication** – Christian literature for general audience
SECTION 7
COPY OF THE ARTIFACT
LIVING OUT THE KINGDOM WITHIN

“... the kingdom of God is within you.”
Luke 17:20-21
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LESSON ONE
GETTING STARTED

Take turns reading paragraphs of the lesson aloud and pausing to discuss when directed:

Deep down inside, do you have this gnawing sense that when Jesus came to “save the world” (John 3:17) that somehow included making this world better? A world that looks like a good King (God) is running the whole show . . . the whole time? Do you have a sense you’re meant to have a part in that but don’t know where to start? Sure, Jesus said his Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), but the Kingdom he brought is very much for this world. Jesus came proclaiming and demonstrating “the Kingdom of God is near” and sent his disciples out to do the same—to continue his ministry of making God’s invisible Kingdom visible.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, churches everywhere jumped on the “every member a minister” bandwagon. A plethora of “spiritual gifts tests” and programs were designed for churches to get every member involved in ministry. Despite their good intentions, these tools ended up directing Christians primarily toward “church ministry,” filling roles and doing tasks inside their church. These tools never did much to mobilize Christians to continue Jesus’ ministry of making God’s invisible Kingdom visible in their local community. On top of that, even after taking “gifts tests” and going through studies, few Christians were confident of knowing their gifts, or of using and developing them in ministry.

SHARE: What, if any, has been your experience of discovering your “spiritual gifts” and applying those in ministry?

In this study, we’ll see that the twenty-first century church better understands “spiritual gifts” as ministries the Holy Spirit manifests through believers; not only to serve their local church, but also to embody God’s Kingdom in their local community.

You are about to embark on a small group process that will guide you in discovering your Spirit-given Kingdom ministry assignments. Kingdom ministry is service in Jesus’ name and the Spirit’s power that embodies (gives tangible, visible form to) God’s Kingdom both inside your local church and outside in your local community.

This curriculum was developed with a couple biblical principles especially in view:

1. The lessons can be led by a “facilitator”—they don’t require an expert or teacher. All the content necessary to walk the group through the meeting time is already on these pages. One of the goals of this curriculum is that participants will grow in
experiencing Jesus as teacher and Holy Spirit as minister, both directly through the scripture readings, and also through other group members during group time. Practice this right now:

Stop and read the following two passages together right now. Are they new to you? As a group, talk about what you think they mean.
- Matthew 23:8-10
- John 14:25-26

2. This curriculum/small group process does not require advance preparation. Participants are welcome to read and reflect ahead of time, but it is not presumed that they will. The top priority is the quality of the experience during group time.

Stop again and read the following passages together. What do these verses tell you about the benefits of meeting together? What do you most want to experience from your time spent going through this study together?
- Hebrews 10:24-25
- Ephesians 5:15-20

To these ends, each lesson is made up of following the following sections:

- **SHARING STORIES**: Each time you gather, you’ll take time to catch up. You’ll share stories of God’s work in you and through you between meetings. And you’ll listen to and speak into one another’s stories. This kind of sharing is essential to our ongoing understanding of how God wants to work in us and through us.

- **THE BIG IDEA**: This section presents the main point of the lesson in a nutshell.

- **WHAT DOES GOD SAY?**: You’ll read and discuss scripture passages together every week.

Stop here and look up the following verses. What unique qualities do the scriptures have compared to other literature?
- 2 Timothy 3:16
- Hebrews 4:12

- **DISCUSS**: This is a chance to hear how the Spirit is speaking and interpreting verses to each person, have a friendly debate, and learn from one another. Again, the Bible assumes Christians do this with each other: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you
‘richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom . . .’” (Colossians 3:16).

• **SOMETHING MORE:** Every once in a while, a related issue or topic will come up that deserves more attention than this curriculum can give, but is too important not to at least mention. It should be good fodder for more discussion.

• **PRAYER AND APPLICATION ACTIVITY:** There’s no replacement for staying “alert” and praying for one another “in the Spirit.” There’s also no replacement for “doing [practicing] what the word says.” As far as this last section goes, make sure you leave enough time to do it at every meeting. See Ephesians 6:18 and James 1:22. Practice doing it now:

**PRAYER AND APPLICATION ACTIVITY**

1. Find out how you can pray for one another between now and your next meeting. Write these down here so you don’t forget!

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

2. Share your experiences and comfort level with spoken “conversational” prayer. For this first meeting, have someone who is comfortable close in prayer for the group.

3. If these weren’t predetermined, before everyone departs, agree on:
   • Where you’ll have your next meeting.
   • What time you’ll start and end your next meeting.
   • Who will facilitate the next meeting?
   • Anything else your group needs to figure out (e.g. refreshments, child-care, etc.).

4. For next time, take a look ahead at the **SHARING STORIES** section at the top of the next page. Do some reflecting on that question in preparation.
LESSON TWO
WHAT IS THE KINGDOM?

SHARING STORIES
What picture do you have of “the Kingdom of God”? When and where have you seen the Kingdom of God?

THE BIG IDEA: Jesus wants you involved in Kingdom ministry, not just church ministry.

There’s a lot more talk about the Kingdom these days. On one hand, Jesus must be pleased. An astounding fact is that Jesus only talks about the church (ekklesia) twice—and that’s twice in a single gospel: Matthew verses 16:18 and 18:17. In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus talks about the church to remind his followers something about the church and the kingdom: “I will build my church . . . I will give you the keys to the kingdom!” Most Christians have been led to believe that Jesus charged his followers with building the church, but he never actually did. Instead Jesus says, “I’ll take care of church growth—I’m giving you the keys to the kingdom.” In case we miss Jesus’ point, Jesus talks about the kingdom (basileia) over 120 times throughout all four gospels!

The basileia of God may be the single defining element that separates Jesus from his Jewish heritage. The term does not appear in the Hebrew scriptures, and rarely in the Christian scriptures outside the Gospels. In the Gospels, though, we encounter a relentless parade of kingdom metaphors and teachings—a pearl, a treasure, a farmer, a seed, leaven and on and on. . . . Jesus had far more to say about life on earth than he did about life after death.¹

The one time Jesus’ disciples asked him how they should pray he instructed them to ask: “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is heaven.” One would get the impression that the Kingdom is foremost in Jesus’ mind—and the ultimate objective of his ministry. (And that might have something to do with his followers’ ministry!) So, Jesus might be pleased to hear his present-day followers talking about the Kingdom once again. On the other hand, as we blithely slip this word “Kingdom” back into our Christian-ese, do we have any idea what we are talking about—or more to the point, what Jesus is talking about? Would Jesus say we get it or not?

¹ David Giuliano, "Don't Sell out the Kingdom," Clergy Journal 82, no. 7 (2006): 16.
WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Kingdom 101: A Quick “Kingdom Survey” through the Bible

Take turns locating and reading these passages aloud. Have someone make a list of your observations about the Kingdom of God.

- Two well-known Kingdom parables: Mark 4:26-32; Matthew 13:31-33
- Other New Testament Kingdom verses: Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 4:20; Revelation 11:15
- Other Old Testament Kingdom verses: 1 Chronicles 29:10-13; Psalm 45:6
- Verses about King Jesus: Isaiah 9:2-7, 11:1-10
- Other verses describing a time and place where God’s full reign is in effect: Isaiah 2:1-4, 25:6-8, 35:5-7, 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-5

Let’s further organize the information we’ve gathered about God’s Kingdom. It has been said that God’s Kingdom exists “whenever and wherever God’s will is done.”

From your list of observations, complete these sentences:

- We see evidence of God’s kingdom at times when ____________________________.
- We see evidence of God’s kingdom in places where ____________________________.

SOMETHING MORE: Did you notice there is both an “already” and “not yet” aspect to God’s Kingdom? Jesus says the Kingdom is already here in our midst. With Jesus’ first arrival and earthly ministry, God’s Kingdom has already broken into history to a degree. It’s currently available to be received or entered (two of Jesus’ favorite expressions) by all people! Jesus invites all people to learn and implement God’s “good, pleasing, and perfect will” (Romans 12:2) right now on earth—by making Jesus their King and serving as Kingdom agents. So at this point in history, God’s kingdom continues to quietly break in and spread, often imperceptibly, in our broken world. At the same time, God’s rule is not yet fully operative on earth. All creation (including all humanity) is waiting—“groaning”—to be delivered from its “bondage to decay” (Romans 8:18-22). When Jesus returns a second and final time in glory and power, everything will be made new and

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2 Frank R. Tillapaugh and Rich Hurst, Calling (Colorado Springs: Dreamtime, 1997), 45.
imperishable. Every last fallen human sovereignty will be replaced with God’s good sovereignty.

DISCUSS

How can you act as mustard seeds or yeast to get God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven (making God’s invisible reign increasingly visible to the fallen world around us) even while right now you are waiting for Jesus’ return and the establishment of God’s full reign in the new heavens and new earth?

SOMETHING MORE: Don’t confuse the church with the Kingdom! The church is the vehicle, the Kingdom is the objective. The church is made up of all those who’ve already received and entered the Kingdom and serves as the primary visible outpost of God’s Kingdom. It “announces” God’s reign and demonstrates God’s reign to the world around it.

PRAYER AND APPLICATION ACTIVITY

• Close your meeting by praying together for God’s Kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Pray specifically according to God’s will for the Kingdom realities promised in the scriptures you studied together.

• Between now and your next meeting:

  1) Ask God to open your eyes to evidence of His Kingdom quietly breaking in right around you.

  2) From your Bible study list, consider a reality of God’s Kingdom you’d especially like to see come in your local community.

  3) Ask God to show you how (where and when) you can engage in “Kingdom ministry”—that is, serve as an agent to make that Kingdom reality tangible and visible to your local community.

• Next time, be ready to share new ways you noticed God’s Kingdom breaking in around you and ideas God planted in your mind and heart about becoming a Kingdom agent.
LESSON THREE

CHRIST-FOLLOWERS CONTINUE JESUS’ KINGDOM MINISTRY

SHARING STORIES

What evidence do you see of God’s Kingdom breaking in around you?

Share the particular reality of God’s Kingdom you’d especially like to see come in your local community. Did God give you ideas on how to be his Kingdom agent to make that reality tangible and visible to your local community?

THE BIG IDEA: Jesus is sending you out to continue his Kingdom ministry.

Many Christians are familiar with “the Great Commission”—Jesus commissioning of his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20. In this lesson we are going to look at the briefest (but equally “great”!) of all Jesus’ commissioning statements found in John 20:21b: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

If Jesus is sending us as the Father sent him, what did the Father send Jesus to do that we are to continue doing? Again, many Christians are familiar with John 3:16-17: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Obviously, Jesus’ work of salvation is something only he could do, and it’s been done, once for all, for all time! (Romans 6:10)

But Jesus did some other works that he does expect his followers to continue doing. As a matter of fact, Jesus says we’ll do even greater works than he was able to himself (John 14:12) so we better understand what Jesus means! Following Jesus means doing what we would do if we were literally, physically following him around, imitating his work as his disciples had opportunity to do. This begs the next question, what kinds of activities were Jesus and his disciples doing?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Read Luke 4:14-21

As Jesus recited Isaiah 61:1-2, he totally stunned his Jewish listeners by announcing he had been anointed by the Spirit to fulfill the ministry of—to be—the Messiah! “It was in
essence Jesus’ *mission statement*, and it laid out the great promises of God to those who receive the Messiah and His coming kingdom.”

The Messiah’s ministry had three main components:

4. The proclamation of the good news of salvation (“to preach good news to the poor”)

5. Compassion for the sick and the sorrowful (“recovery of sight to the blind”)

6. A commitment to justice (“proclaim freedom for the prisoners,” “to release the oppressed,” “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,” (referring to the Old Testament year of Jubilee from Leviticus 25:8-55—God’s way of keeping the ground level between the rich and the poor).†

Biblical scholars debate whether we should understand these verses literally or metaphorically, but for the sake of continuing Jesus’ ministry, let’s do both! Throughout the gospels, we see that Jesus’ ministry is a holistic combination of preaching, healing, and securing justice for the oppressed. He’s always busy simultaneously meeting both spiritual and physical needs.

**Read Matthew 4:23, 9:35-36**

- What was Jesus doing as he “went through” towns and villages?
- What motivated him?
- How easy or difficult is it for you to allow your heart to be broken with the things that break Jesus’ heart?
- How easy or difficult is it for you to take constructive action to address those things that break Jesus’ and your heart?


- What did Jesus send his twelve disciples out to do?
- What did Jesus send the larger group of 72 out to do?
- How does it appear Jesus expects *all* his followers to be imitating his ministry, not just the original group of twelve?

**SOMETHING MORE:** The Greek word most often used for ministry in the New Testament is *diakonia*, (service) but the Greek word that has been translated “heal/healing” in the verses you’ve read is *therapeuein*.

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‡ Ibid., 21, 22.
• What English word is plainly visible in the root?

• How does Jesus use preaching and healing, words and deeds (“therapy”), together to convey the total “good news of the Kingdom”?

Jesus’ accompanies his preaching (the message of “good news”) with healing (the wholeness of the Kingdom). Healing is “therapy” to the people arousing Jesus’ compassion. Jesus means for all his followers to be imitating him in both of those activities. Let’s unpack this further and look at one more familiar passage.

Read Matthew 9:35–38

Many Christians have heard Matthew 9:37–38 taught as an exhortation to “get out there in the harvest field and evangelize”—that is, evangelize with words. The two verses immediately preceding (9:35-36) receive less attention: “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

In the Bible, the “harassed and helpless” are in the forefront as recipients of Jesus’ compassion and his physical and spiritual “therapy.” When Jesus is in the harvest field, his ministry “is especially seen in care for the poor, the oppressed, the dispossessed, refugees and aliens, all those who suffer, and in general those with no social power.”\(^5\) Jesus showed us the purest motivation for mission—namely, compassion. Not only compassion for sinners but also for the sinned-against—victims of others’ and society’s sin.

We’re all at once both sinners and “sinned against.”

Think of the “harassed and helpless” in your local community. Who or what group in particular arouses your compassion?

Read Matthew 9:12-13, Revelation 21:4

Healing, in the broadest sense, means to restore something that is broken to wholeness.

• What’s the connection between all Jesus’ word pairings in this short passage: healthy/sick, mercy/sacrifice, righteous/sinners?

• What is absent in the new earth with totally restored health and wholeness?

In announcing “the kingdom is near,” Jesus’ earthly ministry fundamentally marks the beginning of the end of spiritual and physical brokenness and suffering of all kinds.

SOMETHING MORE: If you’re now convinced that Jesus wants you involved in “healing” ministry but can’t get comfortable with that terminology, you might prefer the concept of compassion ministry: “Compassion is therefore a mind and heart response of openness to God’s leading, which arises from a personal observation of human need, physical and/or spiritual; and that leads to specific action taken to meet that need.”

Summary

When Jesus says he’s sending us out “in the same way” he was sent by the Father, he means for us to carry on preaching to and healing the harassed and helpless in his name to show the world that “the Kingdom of God is at hand.” He not only means for Christ-followers to do this in his name (in his character), but also in his power, the topic of our next lesson.

PRAYER AND APPLICATION ACTIVITY

• Close your meeting by praying together for God to give you compassion as Jesus felt compassion. Spend time listening and learning how you as group members are in need of one another’s compassion in your lives right now. Lift those needs up in prayer. Close by asking God to expand your compassion to those beyond your group—toward the “harassed and helpless” in your local community.

• Between now and your next meeting:

1) Continue to pray for your group members.

2) Continue to pray for God to expand your compassion.

3) Expect God to be expanding your compassion and pay attention to new ways you notice your compassion being aroused.

• Next time, be ready to share new ways you noticed yourself feeling Jesus’ compassion toward the harassed and helpless in your local community. Who are the harassed and helpless God is especially bringing to your attention, what are their specific needs (spiritual and physical), and how might you act to meet those needs? (Think “mustard seed” small and simple—don’t paralyze yourself by overwhelming yourself!)

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LESSON FOUR

THE MISSIONARY HOLY SPIRIT AND THE KINGDOM

SHARING STORIES

Share new ways you noticed yourself feeling Jesus’ compassion toward “harassed and helpless” in your local community.

1. Who are the harassed and helpless God is especially bringing to your attention?
2. What are their specific needs (spiritual and physical)?
3. What’s one small “mustard seed” action you might take to meet those needs?
4. Do you feel adequate to take that step? Why or why not? Where are you going to get the strength to act on your compassion?

THE BIG IDEA: The Holy Spirit continues Jesus’ Kingdom ministry through you.

Embodying God’s Kingdom in the way we’ve been talking about is not mere social activism—a human effort to create heaven on earth. Any such effort is pointless while the Church exists and works within the confines of this present age and struggles “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). Yet Jesus said that all who have faith in him would do the works that he had been doing and even greater things than these, “because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12) Basically, the disciples would be able to do greater things than Jesus without him around! They surely thought he was nuts!

Jesus went on to tell his followers he would not leave them alone, but his Father would send the Holy Spirit to be with them and in them (John 14:17). Most Christians know in their head—if not experientially—that God sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in them individually, to empower and effect their spiritual transformation. They also know the Holy Spirit fills the church as a collective, blessing the church by distributing gifts members are to share with one another through mutual ministry. But beyond that, they have a hard time imagining what the Holy Spirit is busy doing in the world around them—and what the Holy Spirit would like to do through them to minister in the world beyond the church.

In this lesson, we’ll expand our understanding of the Holy Spirit’s work as “personal transformation agent” and giver of spiritual gifts within the body of Christ to gain a picture of the Holy Spirit’s role in God’s Kingdom. From that vantage point, we’ll see how the Holy Spirit equips us to continue Jesus’ Kingdom ministry in the world.
The first thing we need to get straight is that the missionary Spirit of God is not the personal “possession” of individual Christ-followers or even the church as a whole. The Holy Spirit of God is supernaturally active independently of the church, preparing peoples’ hearts to be receptive to Jesus and God’s Kingdom before, and outside, their contact with the Christ-followers who make up the church. And the Holy Spirit’s been busy this way since creation!

**WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?**

*Look up and read the following verses together.*

When, where, and how the Spirit is at work in these Old Testament verses:

- Genesis 1:2
- Exodus 31:1-5
- Judges 14:6
- Judges 3:9-10; 1 Samuel 16:13; 2 Samuel 23:2
- Isaiah 61:1; Ezekiel 1:28b–2:2; Micah 3:8

When, where, and how the Spirit is at work in these New Testament verses:

- Acts 4:25
- Acts 8:26-39
- Acts 10:9-20
- 2 Peter 1:20-21

**DISCUSS**

- How many of the people in these verses were Christians at the time they were empowered by, influenced by, utilized by or clearly spoken to by the Holy Spirit?
- What do you learn from this?

**SOMETHING MORE:** Theologian Geoffrey Bromiley clarifies that although “the Spirit of God has left his mark on humanity created in the image of God . . . a person needs to receive the new life of the Spirit by believing in Jesus. . . . Eternal life is the breath of the Spirit into a person’s life, after he or she has made a conscious decision to follow the Lord Jesus.”

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When a person establishes a personal, living relationship with God through belief in and conscious committal to the lordship of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up full residence in that person in a qualitatively different way than the way the Holy Spirit enables all humanity. The fullness of the Holy Spirit comes upon people only after belief in Christ. (Acts 2:38, Romans 8:9-11)

- Have you ever pictured the Holy Spirit busy working supernaturally behind the scenes today, invisibly orchestrating the kinds of activities in the Bible passages, right here, right now, with people “right under your nose?” Why or why not?

SOMETHING MORE: Many Christians get nervous about recognizing the invisible Holy Spirit’s activity. What if they’re just making things up or imagining things? Or worse, what if they’re being led completely astray? Is there some kind of scriptural criteria for trustworthy discernment of the Holy Spirit? Theologian Kirsteen Kim says: “To join the Spirit in mission, we need to ask how the Spirit comes and how we recognize the Spirit.”

(Kim 94) Kim suggests four helpful criteria:

1. The confession of Jesus as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3, 1 John 4:2)
2. The evidence of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22)
3. The practice of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)
4. The Spirit is on the side of the poor (Luke 4:18)

- Theologian John Taylor suggests, “Our theology would improve if we thought more of the church being given to the Spirit than the Spirit being given to the church.”

Have you tended to view the Holy Spirit as given exclusively to the church (and the individual members), or do you think the church should in fact be given to the Spirit? What difference does it make to think one way or the other?

It’s easy to attach personal pronouns to Father and Son imagery of God, but many people find it completely mind-bending to know how to visualize or speak about the Holy Spirit. Part of our problem may be that we try too hard to create neat distinctions between the three members of the Godhead and their respective roles.

Read the following verses about the Holy Spirit:

- Acts 16:6-7
- Romans 8:14-15

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9 Ibid., 95.

DISCUSS

• How do the biblical writers perceive the Spirit?

• How does Jesus speak about himself in relation to the Spirit?

• In light of the verses you read, and everything you’ve discussed so far, does the following quote seem like an accurate summary?

When the Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost he came as the Spirit of Christ not just in the sense that he was sent/poured out by the ascended Christ, but also in the sense that came as a ‘personal representative agent’ of Jesus; almost as a ‘substitute’ for Jesus, as One who was going to continue the ministry of Christ to his people and to the world…To a large extent, then, the ministry of the Spirit is to be understood as a continuation of the early ministry of Jesus.¹¹

• As you think about being sent out to continue Jesus’ Kingdom ministry, does it help to think about Jesus and the Spirit more interchangeably? (e.g. if it’s hard for you to visualize an impersonal Spirit inside you, empowering you to do Jesus’ works, is it easier to visualize Jesus inside you empowering you to do Jesus’ works?

PRAYER AND APPLICATION ACTIVITY

• **Close your meeting by praying together** for God to help you comprehend the fact that the Holy Spirit resides in you, empowering you to carry on Jesus’ ministry right here, right now. Pray that even as you have been *given* the Spirit you may also be *given to* the Spirit. Find out how group members need the Spirit’s presence in their lives and pray accordingly.

• **Between now and your next meeting:**

  1) Continue to pray for your group members.

  2) Pray for God to expand your compassion by filling you with Jesus’ compassion through the Holy Spirit.

  3) Start paying closer attention to what activities the Holy Spirit is orchestrating behind the scenes among your friends and neighbors and in your local community. (Don’t expect them to be aware of it—but it’s your job to be alert and

aware of it because God is preparing all parties for a moment of intersection, when Jesus is going to become visible to someone through you. We’re coming to this in the weeks ahead!)

- **Next time**, be ready to share where you believe you might have witnessed the Holy Spirit orchestrating some Kingdom-like effects and activities in your relational encounters and/or in your community.
LESSON FIVE
THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE KINGDOM:
THE COLLECTIVE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

SHARING STORIES
Since your last meeting, share where you’ve seen the Holy Spirit orchestrating some Kingdom activities, either in your relational encounters or in your community.

THE BIG IDEA:  The Holy Spirit resides in the Church as a community to continue Jesus’ Kingdom ministry.

Howard Snyder beautifully summarizes everything we’ve learned so far:

  Doing Jesus’ work is an essential part of the church’s Kingdom witness. As Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, did the works of the Kingdom, so the church today, empowered by the Spirit, is to do the works of the Kingdom. And the works will be even greater than those Jesus did; for God’s Spirit now works in the church, and the church is spread throughout the world.

In this lesson we’re going to understand how the church, as a collective, is sent to carry out Jesus’ Kingdom ministry.

But first, what is the church? When people talk about “going to church,” they usually mean the church building or the worship service they’ll attend in that building. *Ekklesia*, the word Jesus used for church, didn’t refer to either. In New Testament times, *ekklesia* referred to a gathering, an assembly. But Jesus’ *ekklesia* is no ordinary assembly. Other New Testament writers add depth to this word *ekklesia* by giving this particular assembly three powerful metaphors by which to understand themselves:

1. Temple
2. Royal priesthood
3. Body of Christ

We’ll look at each of these more closely, paying attention to what each has to say about the church’s participation in Jesus’ Kingdom ministry.

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12 Snyder, 179.
WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

I. Temple

Look up and take turns reading aloud the following passages:

• 1 Corinthians 3:16-17
• 2 Corinthians 6:16
• Ephesians 2:19-22
• 1 Peter 2:4-6

DISCUSS

• Who or what is the temple?
• What connection do you see in the following quote between God’s people being the temple and Kingdom ministry?

A more radical reinterpretation of the traditional temple concept is difficult to imagine. God’s “dwelling” upon on earth is a people rather than a building, a ‘holy people’ “set apart” for God rather than from the world, a people mandated to mission rather than coddled in seclusion, a people called by God to the living of salvation in the matrix of everyday life rather than delivered from life’s cares and responsibilities, a people who live ’before God’ at all times and in all places rather than lead double lives in segregated sacred and secular compartments. Ministry in such a temple-community can only be worldward in its thrust.13

II. Royal priesthood

Look up and take turns reading aloud the following passages:

• Exodus 19:5-6
• 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9

DISCUSS

• Have you known (or do you know) any priests? When you hear the word “priest,” what do you think of a priest doing?
• Who are the priests in these verses—a select group or all God’s people?

SOMETHING MORE: It’s imperative that Christ-followers see themselves as priests and own their priestly responsibilities, yet so few do. That’s largely because when they hear the word “priest,” most think of someone else—the “clergy.” They’ve never been

taught what their God-given priestly responsibilities actually are. Take time to read through the following as a group and discuss 1) what is new information to you, and 2) how this changes your perception of your role as a Christ-follower in the world around you:

. . . [In the Old Testament] the laos as a whole is God’s “possession,” chosen not for privilege alone but for the privilege of service. Notice also that the nature of this service is spelled out in direct connection with God’s claim upon “all the earth.” Israel is called from ‘among all the peoples’ to serve as ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ in behalf of the kingdoms and nations of the world. [Exod. 19:5-6, Gen. 12:1-3] In this priestly service, Israel represents God to the world and the world to God. This people, the laos of God, is called, constituted, and commissioned to fulfill a mediating ministry.

Even the later development of an official priesthood within Israel does not nullify this fundamental task of the people of God. For this later official priesthood always functions in representative capacity for the entire laos and its purpose is to enable the people as a whole to fulfill its priestly ministry to the world.

. . . As in ancient Israel, so also in the new Israel the laity are those who “belong to the people,” to the people who belong to God, to the God who in Jesus Christ calls them to a mediating ministry in behalf of the world.”

. . . The so-called ‘clergy,’ themselves members of the laos, have their own special ministry within the priestly community. . . . But when it is identified as “the ministry” of the community itself, as has been the tendency within the history of the church, the result is a theological disaster. For the laos then delegates the ministry, primarily, if not exclusively to the “clergy,” and relegates the “laity” (now understood as non-clergy) to the role of “supporting cast.” Further, this identification of the ministry of the laos with the special ministry of the kleros (clergy) also introverts the direction of the ministry of God’s people. For the ministry of the “clergy” is directed predominantly to the community itself, with the result that the ministry of the community to the world is shamefully neglected. The ministry inevitably becomes self-serving, directed inward toward the development and preservation of individual faith and institutional health.

The vision of a priestly ministry turned outward to the world may seem at first contradictory because of our common association of a priesthood with cultic duties performed in the service of a sanctuary. . . . Priestly service suggests withdrawal from the world rather than involvement in it. . . . Yet the Christian community should remember that in Jesus Christ the priesthood of the laos of God has been redefined.14

Pulling everything together, what connection do you see in the following quotes between God’s people being “a royal priesthood” and Kingdom ministry?

14 Ibid., 15-19.
The whole church is a kingdom of priests, a priestly kingdom. The church is a priestly people set free for the Kingdom of God. . . . So the church is Christ’s body in the world, charged and empowered to represent God to the world and bring the world to God.\textsuperscript{15}

. . . [T]he priestly ministry of God’s laity requires a willingness to ‘show and tell’ the good news of his love for the world. God’s “royal priesthood” serves him in the world beneath the high priesthood of Christ, enjoying direct access to the divine presence, using that access to intercede for the world with which it has identified itself in obedience to the model of the earthly ministry of Jesus.\textsuperscript{16}

III. Body of Christ

Look up and take turns reading aloud the following passages:

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27
- Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:4
- Colossians 1:18

DISCUSS

Who or what is “the body” in these verses? Who is the head of the body?

What connection do you see in the following quote between the church being “the body of Christ” and Kingdom ministry?

It seems at first that whenever Paul speaks of the body of Christ, the matter at hand is one that is “internal” to the church, not one that has an “external” dimension. Yet it is by means of his body, the church, that the risen Christ relates to the world. It is not necessary to adopt the view that the body of Christ is an “extension of the incarnation” in time and space. But one can claim, nevertheless, that that it is through that body that Christ continues to relate to the world. For it is through his body, the church on earth, that Christ continues to be known. To be sure, he is in no way confined to his body. But it is by means of his body that he has an earthly existence.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15}Snyder, 171-2.

\textsuperscript{16}Gillespie, 30-2.

PRAYER AND APPLICATION ACTIVITY

• **Close your meeting by praying together** that the meaning behind being a member of the *temple, body of Christ, and Kingdom of priests* would begin to take root in your hearts and orient you outward in service of the Kingdom. Find out how you can be priests to one another and intercede for one another right now.

• **Between now and your next meeting:** Ask God where you can serve as a priest, representing Him to someone you know, and representing that person back to God by interceding on their behalf. Follow through with those activities.

• **Next time,** be prepared to share your experience acting as a priest—both representing God to someone, and representing that person to God on their behalf in prayer. What did you learn through this experience?
LESSON SIX
THE KINGDOM WITHIN:
THE INDIVIDUAL AS TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

SHARING STORIES
Share your experience acting as a priest—both representing God to someone, and representing that person to God on their behalf in prayer.
What did you learn through this experience?

THE BIG IDEA: The Holy Spirit resides in you personally—individually—to continue Jesus’ Kingdom ministry.
The Bible is full of a lot of “both/and”s. In this lesson we’re looking at the second part of this “both/and” truth: 1) the Holy Spirit resides in the church as a collective and, 2) the Holy Spirit resides within each member of the church individually. Now, we’re getting to the crux of Kingdom ministry—the title of this study—Living Out the Kingdom Within.

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21, emphasis added).

In asking this question, the Pharisees had in mind a political kingdom, complete with a human leader (king) and geographic borders. Jesus said, no, you won’t see God’s kingdom coming that way, because it’s actually already inside you.

WHAT DOES GOD SAY?
Look up the following verses and read them aloud:
• 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
• Romans 12:1
DISCUSS
• Where does the Holy Spirit reside?
• How does it feel to know “you are not your own; you were bought with a price?”
• As a group, brainstorm the multitude of ways, even dimensions, you can honor God with your body.

• When you think about “knowing God’s will,” have you been more concerned about knowing God’s will and getting it done in your personal life, your Christian community, or in the world God loves?

As soon as we stop to ponder that the single, breakable, finite human body we currently inhabit the earth in is the same body the Holy Spirit resides in, we’re confronted with another paradox. How is it that we supposedly house the resurrection power of the Almighty (see Ephesians 1:17-20, 3:20) while we’re stuck with all kinds of weaknesses and limitations at the same time? Wouldn’t that prevent us from visibly demonstrating anything like the full capacity of the Spirit’s power? The apostle Paul says, “we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). This is yet another way we’re caught in between the “already” and “not yet” of God’s Kingdom. So how do we live out the kingdom within while we live in this paradox?

**Look up the following passage and have a group member read aloud:**

• 2 Corinthians12:7b-10

**NOTE:** “weakness” in these verses is not a sin or character flaw that you can change; the Greek word here refers to an illness or limitation—physical, mental, or emotional—you were born with and/or have no power to change.

**DISCUSS**

• What “thorn in the flesh” do you live with, without which—if God just took it away—you believe you could do so much more?

• How do you suppose God’s power is “made perfect in weakness”?

• Our culture trains us to “boast about our strengths”—even our churches encourage us to identify and operate out of our strengths. Can you imagine joining Paul in “boasting” and “delighting” in your weaknesses? Why or why not?

• Why does Paul look upon his weaknesses in such a positive light?

• How are you willing to risk discovering the secret Paul has discovered in verse 10?

This strength-in-weakness paradox is so counterintuitive to us and honestly a bit hard to embrace. After all, who wants to be “weak”? What could possibly be the advantage? Most of us will need some serious retraining of our thinking to identify with Paul’s positive attitude.
Read the following quotes and share with your group which one you find particularly motivating and why:

- Even as Christ accomplished atonement for us by suffering and death, so the Lord accomplishes witness to the world through our weakness. In fact, God has more need of our weakness than our strength . . . our power becomes a rival to God . . . God’s way is not to take us out of tribulations but to comfort us in the midst of them and to “exchange” our strength in the face of them. By our union with Christ in the power of the Spirit in our weaknesses, we display God’s glory.  

- The good news of the Gospel is that God wants to be with us in the middle of our struggles. That is precisely when He exercises His strength in us. Paul learned to let God be in charge . . . God’s strength flowed through him because Paul stopped trying to be in control. He let God take over and God was able to use him more effectively . . . Redemption means that out of our greatest pain can come our most profound personal mission in life.  

- Rick Warren shares several upsides to knowing and admitting our weaknesses:
  - Our weaknesses cause us to depend on God.
  - Our weaknesses keep us humble.
  - Our weaknesses keep us open to receiving ministry from others.
  - Our weaknesses actually increase our capacity for empathy and ministry (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).
  - Our weaknesses create community while our strengths invite competition.
  - Someone who admits their weaknesses is more credible, and therefore ultimately more influential, than someone who appears “perfect.”

As difficult as it is to take a look at some of your “thorns in the flesh,” to deny or ignore them will seriously undermine the Holy Spirit’s power working through you. Sure, you can strive to maximize your human strengths (there are several books on that!), but it’s still a drop in the bucket compared to what the Holy Spirit can do through you because “the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 Corinthians 1:25). Awareness

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of your weaknesses and limitations is precisely where you need to start to discern the Kingdom ministry assignments God has for you.

PRAYERS AND APPLICATION ACTIVITY

• **Close your meeting by praying together** for openness to identifying and admitting your “thorns in the flesh” and for God to begin to show you how His power might be revealed through them. If you’re willing, share what’s coming to mind with group members so they can lift those up specifically in prayer.

• **Between now and your next meeting:** Take some time and look at these categories of weaknesses and limitations. Every human being lives with some or all of these affecting their capacity at any given time. Some are simply “season of life” factors, but they still count. Make a list of weaknesses/limitations that currently affect your ministry capacity:

  - **Personality:** where do you get your energy (introvert/extrovert)? Do you prefer structure and predictability or unstructured spontaneity?
  - **Season of life:** children, health, passages of family members, etc., can create extra stress and/or demand extra attention.
  - **Life situation:** marriage, family, age, disability, etc.
  - **Emotional, physical, and intellectual capacities:** We don’t determine our capacity and we’re not all the same. (Parable of talents, Matthew 25:14-15; gifts, Romans 12:6)
  - **Negative emotions:** Function like warning lights on a dashboard that tell us something is not right on the inside (engine) of our lives.
  - **Scars and wounds from our family past:** hurt and dysfunction still playing out in our lives creates limits to our capacity.21 (Scazzero, p 142-3)

• **Next time,** be ready to share:

  1) How your thinking and attitude has developed concerning the reality that the Holy Spirit himself resides in your finite, fragile human body.

  2) What weaknesses and/or limitations God brought to your attention and how He might show His strength through them to others around you.

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LESSON SEVEN

JESUS’ SECRETS FOR DISCERNING AND SUSTAINING KINGDOM MINISTRY

SHARING STORIES

Share how your thinking and attitude has developed concerning the reality that the Holy Spirit himself resides in your finite, fragile human body.

What weaknesses and/or limitations did God show you He can work through—and demonstrate His supernatural power through—in the world around you?

THE BIG IDEA: Jesus teaches us how to discern when the Spirit wants to demonstrate his power through our weakness, and when we need to practice self-care.

Jesus is both God and human. Think about it a minute—if Jesus lived and served with human limitations, what makes you think you should ignore or avoid yours? For fear of making Jesus too “comfortable,” too “friendly, too “vulnerable,” some people resist contemplating Jesus’ human side, but Jesus’ most profound strength is demonstrated in what he accomplished while he was confined to a human body. “For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him in our dealing with you.” (2 Corinthians 13:4).

Which takes more strength—to avoid or escape death on a cross (as God, Jesus had more capacity than Houdini to remove himself from the cross at any moment he wanted to), or to remain fully human and remain fully willing to go through the horrific suffering and death of crucifixion to personally assume the punishment for all humanity’s sin for all time (Romans 6:10)? Think again, just how was Jesus “weak” and how was he “strong?”

In this lesson, we’re going to look at a question that paralyzes many when they think about engaging in Kingdom ministry: How do I really know when, where, and to whom God is calling me? Kingdom ministry drained Jesus at times, and it will drain the toughest human being. Following Jesus into Kingdom ministry will take us into demanding, uncomfortable situations, calling for strength we never imagined ourselves to have. Jesus was a master at knowing when to be a conduit of the Spirit’s power in order to serve and heal people and when to literally walk away from desperately needy people clambering after him, in order to get the peace and quiet to refuel with his Father so he could carry on with ministry in his human body.
WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

Read Mark 14:32-42

• What’s going on in this passage?
• How does Jesus say he is feeling? How often do you stop and imagine Jesus having these feelings?
• Who does he turn to for support? Is it hard for you to imagine Jesus needing or leaning on anyone? Why or why not?
• What else does he do to deal with the intense pressure he’s under?

Read Mark 1:29-39

• What’s Jesus been busy doing for many people in this passage?
• Why did Jesus get up so early the next day? Where did he go and what did he do?
• What was Jesus response to the disciples telling him “everyone is looking for you!” (Luke 4:42, which tells the same story, says the people were trying to keep Jesus from leaving them—presumably there were more wanting to be healed).
• What do you suppose enabled Jesus to walk away, knowing that he had not preached to or healed everyone who needed or wanted him to?
• How easy or difficult is it for you to acknowledge your limitations and take the steps Jesus did in these two passages?

Read Mark 6:30-44

• What’s going on in this passage?
• Jesus’ disciples are tired and Jesus himself suggests they should take a rest. What happens as soon as they go “away by themselves to a solitary place”?

DISCUSS

Perhaps you’ve been in this situation yourself. Your body, the people closest to you, even Jesus himself are all telling you to slow down and get some rest. No sooner do you finally listen and allow yourself to do that but Jesus turns right around and presents you with an opportunity to “do the impossible”—something that demands a multiplication of time, energy, and resources you’re sure you don’t have. What do you do? How do you know when God wants you to acknowledge your limitations and follow Jesus’ examples of self-care or keep going so he can demonstrate his miraculous power through your limitations?
Read the following quote and discuss what the author suggests is part of Jesus’ secret to discernment:

Each of these texts demonstrates the unwavering sense of mission and identity that Jesus possessed. Nothing stopped him from affirming his true calling. He did not compromise with other people or forces that pulled him other directions. Jesus’ journey was constantly marked with a need for careful discernment.22

God has given us a Counselor who is available 24/7 to help us discern what God is and is not calling us to do. Look up and read the following verses and discuss the questions together:

• John 14:15-21, 26
• Romans 12:1-2
  o How do these verses tell us is it possible to know God’s will?
• John 10:2-5 14
  o Do you believe that it’s possible to recognize and hear Jesus’ voice? Why or why not? If so, how can we hear his voice today?
  o Do you believe that Jesus wants to speak to you personally “by name?” Why or why not?
  o How important is hearing to following?
• Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message): “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”
  o Do you tend to live under the impression that Jesus is a taskmaster?
  o What is Jesus promising in these verses? Do you believe him?
  o What would it look like for you to both “recover your life” and “walk” and “work” with Jesus so that the Spirit’s power is demonstrated through your weaknesses and limitations?
• Galatians 1:10
  o Can you tell when you’re doing something to gain human approval/please people or when you’re serving Christ by doing what he’s asking you to do?

o Why can’t we please people and serve Christ at the same time?

o How will learning to listen to Jesus’ voice help you avoid being pulled by other people, forces, and “voices,” and instead know exactly what God wants you to say “no” to and what He wants you to say “yes” to?

**PRAYER AND APPLICATION ACTIVITY:**

- **Close your meeting by praying together** to grow in discernment. Pray that you will learn to hear Jesus’ voice—and Jesus’ voice alone—so you will know when to say “yes” and when to say “no.” Share an upcoming decision you need discernment for and pray for one another to hear Jesus’ voice between now and your next meeting.

- **Between now and your next meeting:** Consolidate what you’ve learned about yourself in the last two lessons and practice listening to Jesus’ voice. Pay attention to what other “voices” and forces are interfering with you hearing Jesus’ voice. How they are confusing you or pulling you in multiple directions?

  You may find this question helpful as you practice discernment this week:

  
  Where is the “yes” I need to say in this moment, and what kinds of “no” are needed to protect that commitment?

- **Next time,** be ready to share ways you found listening to Jesus’ voice easy or difficult.
LESSON EIGHT

LIVING OUT THE KINGDOM WITHIN
—IN YOUR LOCAL BODY OF CHRIST

SHARING STORIES

Did you find listening to Jesus’ voice easy or difficult, and why?

Did Jesus direct you in anyway specifically regarding the upcoming decision you asked group members to pray about last time?

Do you need group members to continue to pray?

THE BIG IDEA:

The Holy Spirit wants to minister, in a specific way, through me in my local body of Christ.

Our spiritual gifts are more than our successes. The apostle Paul gets to the heart of spiritual gifts in his words, ‘Now to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good.’ (1 Corinthians 12:7). The gift is not so much the activity but the way the Spirit is revealed. The Spirit is manifest both in our strengths and weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

We started out by saying that despite the good intentions and wide use of “spiritual gifts tests,” these tools have: 1) ended up directing Christians primarily to church ministry without mobilizing them for Kingdom ministry in their local community and, 2) still left many Christians unsure of what their spiritual gifts were and where to use those gifts in ministry.

Part of the problem is simply a natural assumption we make when we see the English word “gift.” Outside the Bible, when we say someone “has a gift,” we mean they have an exceptional ability (aptitude, talent, capacity, or strength). And that’s straight where our mind goes when we see the phrase “spiritual gift” in the Bible—human successes. In this lesson we’re going to take a fresh look at “gifts” in the Bible and see some things we may not have noticed before.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Read the following passages (the first three are well known “gifts list passages”) one at a time and answer the questions below:

- Romans 12:1-8
- 1 Corinthians 12:1-12, 27-31
- Ephesians 4:7-16
- 1 Peter 4:10-11

Ask the following questions of each passage together. Take group notes for each question.

1. Does the word “spiritual gift” appear in all the passages? How about “gift(s)”?
2. Is there any evidence the word “gift” is being used interchangeably with any other word(s)?
3. What does that tell you about the meaning of the word “gift” (pay particular attention to 1 Cor. 12:4-6)?
4. Who gives the gifts in the passages? (Is it always the Holy Spirit?)
5. Who are the gifts for?
6. Who determines the distribution of gifts?
7. According to what basis, if any, are the gifts distributed?

Take time to read through the following notes together. As a reader of an English translation, you need this additional background information to reformulate a biblical concept of “spiritual gift”:

- The actual phrase “spiritual gifts” does not appear in Greek manuscripts of the New Testament at all.24

- Almost everyone has heard the term “charisma” or “charismatic”—the Greek root being charis. In secular usage, “charisma” usually refers to a combination of talent and magnetic personality. In popular Christian usage “charisma” often similarly refers to a “special ability.” However, New Testament scholar Kenneth Berding demonstrates that Paul used the word charisma in such a variety of ways (e.g. charism in Romans 6:23 refers explicitly to “eternal life in Christ Jesus our

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Lord.”). He never meant it to be understood as a technical term meaning “special ability.”

• In the well-known “gifts passages” above, New Testament writers used at least four different Greek words to speak about what English translators turned into the concept “spiritual gifts.” The translators replacing those Greek words with “gift” or “spiritual gift,” intended for them to generically mean “something freely given by God,” while English readers mentally translate “gift” and “spiritual gift” into “special ability.”

• The “special ability” meaning is so taken for granted today that most popular Christian literature defines spiritual gifts as “God-given abilities.” However, a quick look at the Greek words translated “gift” in the passages you read reveals something different:

  1. *Charismata* and *charis* (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4, 8; 1 Peter 4:10): a special manifestation of divine presence, activity, power, or glory; a favor, expression of kindness, gracious-gift, blessing.
  2. *Pnematika* (1 Corinthians 12:1): spiritual, supernatural—things or persons
  3. *Diakoniai* (1 Corinthians 12:5): ministry, service; contribution, help, support; mission
  4. *Energemata* (1 Corinthians 12:6): workings, activities, esp. supernatural effects, operations
  5. *Phanerosis* (1 Corinthians 12:7): bringing to light, disclosure, manifestation, evidence, appearance
  6. *Domata* (Ephesians 4:8): gift (as in a present)

**DISCUSS**

• What meanings and themes stand out amongst these words?

• How has this study changed or expanded your concept of spiritual gifts?

In *Living Out the Kingdom Within*, we define spiritual gifts this way: **ministries the Holy Spirit manifests through believers**, not only to serve their local church but also to embody God’s Kingdom in their local community.

Now let’s return to the big question spiritual gifts discovery tools and programs encourage Christians to ask: What’s my spiritual gift? Kenneth Berding summarizes our change in perspective this way and suggests an alternative question:

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According to the contextual evidence in the letters of Paul, the so-called spiritual gifts should not be viewed as special abilities to do ministry; rather they should be viewed as the ministries themselves. Every believer has been assigned by the Holy Spirit to specific positions and activities of service, small and large, short-term and long-term. These ministry assignments have been given by the Holy Spirit to individual believers and, in turn, these individuals in their ministries have been given as gifts to the church.\textsuperscript{26}

Someone who holds to the spiritual-gifts-as-abilities view must ask, (1) Which ministry should I serve in? and (2) Which special ability do I have or not have? . . . The person who follows the spiritual-ministries approach need ask only a single question—a question asked repeatedly throughout the history of Christianity: “Lord, where do you want me to serve?”\textsuperscript{27}

By consolidating key ideas from the last three lessons, we are ready to reframe the question, “what’s my spiritual gift?” to “how does the Holy Spirit want to minister through me?”

**SOMETHING MORE:** The gifts-as-ability understanding of spiritual gifts suggests that Christians possess latent spiritual gifts that they may or may not choose to exercise. After the Bible study you just completed, do you think the gifts spoken of in the scriptures can be said to exist at all, if they are not employed for others?

**PRAYERS AND APPLICATION ACTIVITY**

- **Close your meeting by praying together** for discernment on how the Holy Spirit wants to minister through you and group members. Ask God what ministry the Holy Spirit is assigning to each of you, so that you function as gifts to one another and your local body of Christ.

- **Between now and your next meeting,** you’re going to ask God how he wants you to serve your local church and begin to discern your Holy Spirit–given ministry assignment in the body of Christ. Although these lessons have focused your thinking and growth around the strength-in-weakness paradox, the Holy Spirit works through your strengths and talents as well. The following questions will guide you in recalling where you have enjoyed, and felt especially effective, serving in the past, as well as help you discover where you might be willing to discover the Holy Spirit working through you outside your known strengths and experiences. Jot your thoughts down in space provided:

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 32, 201.
1. Holy Spirit–given ministry assignments are gifts to the body, so begin by considering needs within the body.
   - Respond to a current need: Where is your church calling for servants and which opportunities are you open to considering?
   - Anticipate and take initiative to address a future need: What particular need do you foresee, or concern do you have for future ministry at your church?

2. How does the Holy Spirit want to minister through you to meet the needs you identified above?
   - Name one to three past serving activities in which have you felt joy and energy flowing.
   - Name one to three past serving activities during which others told you had been fruitful and a blessing.
   - What has been your most meaningful service at any church?
   - Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit doing something effectively through you that you had no prior ability for or in spite of a weakness/limitation? Explain.
   - Would you be willing to just jump in to meet a need or address a concern you’ve identified, and discover how the Holy Spirit empowers you in a new way to serve or meet that need?

3. Write down where you see a “match” or intersection between needs in your local church and your responses to the questions immediately above.

   • Next time, be ready to share your reflections from the exercise above and receive feedback and confirmation from your group members.
LESSON NINE

LIVING OUT THE KINGDOM WITHIN
— IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

SHARING STORIES

Share your reflections from the exercise above. Give one another feedback and confirm when and where you have seen the Holy Spirit working through each other in your group or local church. Then encourage each member to follow up and serve in the specific way they believe the Holy Spirit is assigning and empowering them.

Have each member name the ministry leader they will contact about that area of service between now and your next meeting.

THE BIG IDEA: The Holy Spirit wants to minister in a specific way through you in your local community.

Today, the Church is experiencing renewed conviction regarding its “missional” mandate—its occupation of being sent into the world to embody the Kingdom. In a nutshell, missional means “mission is the work of the whole church, the whole time [emphasis added].”28 In the following paragraph, theologian Hans-Ruedi Weber pulls together everything we’ve talked about so far.

To become a fully apostolic [sent] Church means to be taken into the apostolic movement from communion with Christ into Christ’s mission; and the aim of this mission is not to ‘churchify’ the world but to witness to Christ so that the world may believe and God’s kingdom come. To be a charismatic Church means to exist for service, because it belongs to the essense of each charisma not to be used for self-edification but to be spent for others. And to fulfill the priestly ministry means nothing less than that the priestly people are ‘permitted and enabled to share in the continuing high-priestly work of Christ by offering themselves in love and obedience to God and in love and service of men.’ True lay movements look beyond the world of the Churches and draw them into the movement of God’s love for the world.29

A healthy, missional body of Christ lives and breathes a rhythm of being assembled and sent out. When the body of Christ (the church) is gathered, members function as priests


to each other, serving one another according to their Holy Spirit–assigned ministries and building up one another toward maturity in Christ (Eph 4). You asked God for your Holy Spirit–given ministry assignment in that gathered arena in the last lesson.

At the same time, members are sent out as priests into the world to continue Jesus’ ministry by representing God’s Kingdom to their local community and representing their local community back to God. This lesson will prepare you to discern your Holy Spirit–given ministry assignment in that sent arena—the specific part you play in embodying God’s Kingdom out in the world God loves.

As we learned, “spiritual gifts” have been so commonly associated with ministry inside the body of Christ that it’s been hard for Christ-followers to see that the Holy Spirit wants to minister through them just as much out in their workday world. As a matter of fact, that is most Christ-followers paramount ministry assignment!

There are those gifts of the Spirit which do not always minister to Christians; that is, the object of the ministry depends on the need that the gift is given to meet. Evangelism, for example, is exercised exclusively among the unbelieving. The gift of healing is exercised among the Christian and non-Christian alike . . . Even the gift of tongues, according to 1 Cor. 14:22, is “a sign not for believers but for unbelievers.” . . . It makes sense, then, that the ministry of gifts of the Holy Spirit are not limited to the household of faith because a brief consideration of the activity of the Holy Spirit will demonstrate that it is not limited only to the sphere of the individual believer or even the Church, but extends to the whole creation.30

Ray Stedman reminds us in his watershed book Body Life, the book that started the whole “every member a minister” movement: “We must continually remember that the work of ministry is to the world . . . For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . . (John 3:16) . . . the ministry of the body is the ministry of Jesus Christ, at work in human society.”31 As long as Christ-followers fail to be fully available as conduits of the risen Lord’s ministry in the world, and fail to be fully aware of the Holy Spirit’s activities all around them, they undermine Jesus’ visibility to the rest of the world.


31 Ray Stedman, Body Life (Glendale: Regal Books Division, 1972), 94, 98.
WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Read Acts 13:1-4

- The apostle Paul (here still going by his other name Saul) is being sent out on his first missionary journey. Who gave specific direction regarding Barnabas and Saul’s first missionary journey?
- Who was gathered and what were they doing when they received this direction?

SOMETHING MORE: Here are a few more Greek words to know a little more about.

In the verse, “the work to which I have called them,” work = ergon, which means “deed, action, task, occupation, undertaking.” Called = proskeklemai, which means “call, summon, invite.” What does this suggest to us about the body’s part in individual members receiving their call (“summons,” “invitation” from the Holy Spirit)?

- What happens immediately after “they placed their hands on them” and “sent them off”?

SOMETHING MORE: In this verse, sent = apelusan, which means “let go, release, loose, dismiss.” The church’s job is to release people for the work the Holy Spirit is inviting them to do.

- Who else “sent them on their way” in verse 4?

SOMETHING MORE: In this case sent = ekpempo, which means “to dispatch or send forth.” The Holy Spirit is the dispatcher! The church (humans) “release” but God (Holy Spirit) is the “dispatcher”—not visa versa!

- Who’s calling the shots and who’s responding to that call (think both individually and corporately)?


- What pattern do you notice in these verses?

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

- Discuss the wisdom of serving in pairs.
- When you serve in ministry, how often do you serve alongside someone else?

PRAYERS AND APPLICATION ACTIVITY:

- Close your meeting by praying together for discernment about how the Holy Spirit wants to minister specifically through each group member to embody God’s Kingdom in your local community. Ask God what ministry the Holy Spirit is assigning to each of you, so that you function as priests, representing Jesus and his Kingdom to your community, and your community back to God.
• **Between now and your next meeting**, you’re going to ask God where he wants you specifically to embody his Kingdom in the world He loves, and begin to discern your Holy Spirit–given Kingdom ministry assignment in your local community. These questions will guide you in reviewing your reflections from Lesson 3:

1) Discern *who* amongst the “harassed and helpless” Jesus wants to touch through you, think back to your reflections in Lesson 3 and reflect on the questions below. Journal brief responses to these questions:

   - What injustice in your local community makes you especially angry?
   - What suffering in your local community makes you especially sad?

**Here are some categories to get you started thinking:**

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<th>Physically, mentally disabled</th>
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<td>Elderly</td>
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<td>ESL (English as a second language)</td>
<td>Creation care</td>
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2) Discern *who* you have to offer as a Kingdom agent in the world:

   - What is your primary experience in the following three areas: education, work and life in general?

   - Have you navigated a difficult life experience that you’re willing to share and let God use you to help others facing a similar difficulty? Are you willing to be transparent with your own journey of transformation, while giving the glory to God?

   - What has been your most meaningful, exciting, energizing service in the secular realm?

   - Would you be willing to just jump in to meet a need/address a concern you’ve identified, and discover how the Holy Spirit empowers you in a new way (beyond your known capabilities or experience) to serve/meet that need?

**SOMETHING MORE:**

I have come to the place in my life that if the assignment is something I sense God is giving me is something that I know I can handle, I know it is probably *not* from God. The kinds of assignments God gives people in the Bible are always God-sized. They are always beyond what people can do, because He wants to demonstrate His nature, His strength, His provision, and His kindness to His people and to a watching world . . . what our
world is seeing today is a devoted, committed Christian serving God. But they are not seeing God . . . they . . . do not see anything happening that can only be explained in terms of the activity of God.32

3) Discern your Holy Spirit–given Kingdom ministry assignment:
   
   o Where does the compassion of Christ in you intersect the brokenness and need in your local community?
   
   o Where do you see an intersection between the responses in all three sections, i, ii, and iii?
   
   o Write your answers down.

• Next time, be ready to share what you discovered from the exercise above and what you identified as your Holy-Spirit-given Kingdom ministry assignment.

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LESSEE TEN
ORDINATION OF KINGDOM PRIESTS

SHARING STORIES:
Share your reflections from the exercise above with each other. Give one another feedback; name and affirm Holy Spirit–given Kingdom ministry assignments for each group member.

Have each member name who they will contact about that area of service, then encourage each member to follow through.

THE BIG IDEA: All God’s people are endowed, commissioned and appointed by the Holy Spirit to continue Jesus’ ministry in the church and world.

Recently I attended a friend’s ordination as “Minister of the Word and Sacrament” in a mainline denomination. The evening was filled with pomp and fanfare—music, regalia, candles, the works! The whole event felt like something between a wedding and a coronation! Part of me was questioning all the fuss and the message it was sending to the rest of God’s people in the pews. I was thinking to myself, it’s no wonder clergy are put on a pedestal in their own separate class while the rest of God’s people have forgotten they are priests!

At the same time, I was having another thought: what an incredibly powerful occasion of confirmation and blessing by this large assembly of brothers and sisters in Christ! This new minister will never forget being launched into ministry. I begin to imagine what might happen if each member of Christ’s body was showered with as much honor and blessing when they began their Holy Spirit–appointed ministry.

Many of us are accustomed to ordination being reserved for clergy or “church officers,” but let’s lay our assumptions aside for a minute and see where we got our ideas.

References to ordination are few and debatable in the New Testament:

There is no factor unifying either those who lay on hands, or those upon whom hands are laid, nor the purpose of the act, other than disciples supporting and strengthening other disciples to receive the Holy Spirit’s help on the journey in the Way. It is not until the much later text of 1 Timothy 4:14 that one hears of laying on of hands in a more formal sense by the council of elders (Greek presbyterion). But even there, it refers back to the “gift” given to Timothy, who is elsewhere in the New
Testament repeatedly referred to simply as Paul’s “co-worker” and “brother,” and not as a holder of any formal ministerial office.\textsuperscript{33}

The first evidence of ordination becoming an extended rite, rather than simple laying on of hands, shows up in about 217 AD. Ever since then, ordination has been used to set apart clergy in a separate class. Over time, some traditions have done away with rites of ordination in an effort to undo the class distinction between laity and clergy.

But there’s another possibility. What if the church instead recognized all God’s people according to their true, original scriptural designation of \textit{kleros} and ordained all God’s Kingdom priests for their Spirit-given ministry assignments? What if all members of Christ’s body took their ministry as seriously as those who’ve been traditionally ordained?

In Lesson 5 we learned that God never intended separate laity and clergy; we humans later created those distinctions. As a matter of fact, here’s a little history on that:

The word 'laypersons' (\textit{laikoi}) was first used by Clement of Rome at the end of the first century, but was never used by an inspired apostle in Scripture to describe second-class, untrained and unequipped Christians. It ought to be eliminated from our vocabulary. 'Laity,' in its proper New Testament sense of \textit{laos} – the people of God – is a term of great honour denoting the enormous privilege and mission of the whole people of God. . . . (1 Peter 2:9; Ex 19:6).

The word 'clergy' comes from the Greek work \textit{kleros}, which means the 'appointed or endowed' ones. It is used in Scripture not for the leaders of the people but for the whole people.

\ldots In no situation do the apostles use this term [\textit{kleros}] to describe appointment to an ecclesiastical office . . . the term was not used for 'clergy' until the third century. Simultaneously the term 'laity' reappears \ldots laypersons can only exist when they have an opposite against which they can define themselves and, until the second century, there simply was no such opposite!" \textsuperscript{34}

Right along with “spiritual gifts,” many people don’t realize the word “clergy” is nowhere to be found in the New Testament. Those of us now living in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century have totally lost sight of the biblical meanings of both \textit{laos} and \textit{kleros}. Most of us have come to equate \textit{laos} with “lay,” which equals a lower class of “amateur” Christ-followers:

Depending on the specific church context ‘lay’ is defined by \textit{function} (does not administer the Word and sacraments), by \textit{status} (does not have a ‘Rev.’), by \textit{location} (serves primarily in the world), by \textit{education} (is not

\textsuperscript{33} Wes Howard-Brook, \textit{The Church before Christianity} (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 120.

theologically trained), by *remuneration* (is not full-time and paid), and by *
lifestyle* (is not religious but occupied with secular life)—usually in terms
of negatives!35

At the same time, we have equated *kleros* with “clergy,” which equals a separate higher
class of “professional” Christ-followers. The church needs to return to its original,
biblical constitution: “a people without laity, in the usual sense of that word, but full of
clergy, in the true sense of that word—endowed, commissioned and appointed by God to
continue God's own service and mission in the world.”36 Along with that, the church also
needs to recover the biblical gesture for blessing and launching all *kleros* into Kingdom
ministry in a memorable, empowering way.

**WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?**

**Read aloud together and discuss Acts 6:1-6**

• What’s going on here?
• Who has “the ministry of the word of God”?
• Who has was chosen for the ministry “to wait on table”?
• Who receives “laying on of hands”—those who have the seemingly more spiritual
“ministry of the word,” or those chosen for the more practical ministry of
“waiting on tables”?
• What does this tell about when the church should use “laying on of hands”?

**Read aloud together and discuss Acts 8:17 and Acts 19:6**

• What happened in these two instances of “laying on of hands”?
• Since one human being cannot give another human being the Holy Spirit, what
may be the significance of “laying on of hands”?

**Read aloud together and discuss Mark 5:21-30**

• From these two short accounts, what do you imagine might be the significance of
touch?
• How has everything you’ve learned about your body being a temple of the Holy
Spirit help make concrete sense out of what kind of transaction might occur when
blessing a brother or sister with “laying on of hands”?

The study of these scriptures concludes your lessons together. We’ll bring these to life in
one last application activity below. But before that, let’s take a moment to look back and

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35 Ibid., 24-5.
36 Ibid., 5.
tie everything together. Take turns reading aloud the following “big ideas” from each lesson below:

1. Jesus wants you involved in Kingdom ministry, not just church ministry.
2. Jesus is sending you out to continue his Kingdom ministry.
3. The Holy Spirit continues Jesus Kingdom ministry through you.
4. The Holy Spirit resides in the Church as a community to continue Jesus’ Kingdom ministry.
5. The Holy Spirit resides in you personally, individually, to continue Jesus’ Kingdom ministry.
6. Jesus teaches us how to discern when the Spirit wants to demonstrate His power through our weakness, and when we need to practice self-care.
7. The Holy Spirit wants to minister, in a specific way, through you in your local body of Christ.
8. The Holy Spirit wants to minister in a specific way through you in your local community.
9. All God’s people are endowed, commissioned and appointed by the Holy Spirit to continue Jesus’ ministry in the church and world.

NOW IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE AND BLESS ONE ANOTHER'S HOLY SPIRIT–GIVEN MINISTRY ASSIGNMENTS!

Take time to go around your group and complete the following planning steps for each group member’s ordination (“laying on of hands”) using the three steps below. If your church and pastor are on board, calendar group members’ ordinations to occur together during a worship service in the near future. (If you need more time to discern your Holy Spirit–given assignments, postpone your ordination. If you have never been ordained for a ministry you’re already engaged in, by all means receive your community’s blessing upon that service!) In any case, schedule a Kingdom Ministry Celebration and ordain one another within your group. Make it a party and share a meal together!

• Each person should give a title to their specific Holy Spirit–given ministry assignment in their local church and/or local community (e.g. “Minister of ________”, or “Minister to ________”). During your ordination, your pastor or a group member will say: “This is [name], whom the Holy Spirit has assigned to be [Minister of/to __________ in our church] and/or [Minister of/to __________ to embody God’s Kingdom in the world God loves].”

• Each person should receive a “charge.” Select a special scripture that inspires you for ministry. It might be a scripture you encountered during this study. Appoint a brother or sister to read that scripture over you before the laying on of hands. During your ordination, after introducing you and your ministry assignment, your
pastor or a group member will say: “[Name], you have chosen this special scripture verse (or short passage) as your charge.” [Then they proceed with reading the scripture.]

- Lastly, have the community lay hands on those being ordained and let them know what you would especially like prayer for as you begin your ministry. They will lift you up in prayer to bless, strengthen, and commission you to your Holy Spirit–appointed ministry.

As you go forward, LIVING OUT THE KINGDOM WITHIN, encourage one another often and go about your ministry “two by two” whenever possible!
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This dissertation is an academic version of my personal story. I became a Christian as a teenager at the height of the charismatic renewal movement in the mid-70s. My first contact with the church was a wonderful little evangelical PC(USA) church close to our house. This church where I came to faith loved Jesus, loved the Bible, and loved people. I felt a “call to the ministry” (to use an expression I wouldn’t use now) before I was 20 and completed my masters level theological education by the time I was 28. The PC(USA) held a very progressive theology toward women in ministry but has also maintained a very lengthy and uncompromising process for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Although I thought of pursuing ordination at many junctures in the last twenty five years, I never lived in the right place at the right time to fulfill the requirements.

Since 1986 I’ve held a number of paid ministry staff positions in several churches and have been blessed to always work alongside pastors who made me a true ministry partner and willingly shared any type of ministry task with me—including preaching. In most of these positions I have been a program director, whose main responsibilities revolved around volunteer recruitment and equipping members for ministry. It was in these trenches that I found my passion for “spiritual gifts discovery” and equipping ministry. During the 80s and 90s I was a “spiritual gifts test junky”—I made a hobby of collecting every new test and book that came out on the subject. Many hundreds of people have been my experimental guinea pigs over the years as I excitedly implemented each latest and greatest lay mobilization program on the market.

In the 90s I begin to notice some flaws in these materials. Those flaws, combined with an enjoyment of writing and developing systems and programs myself, I began to
customize and develop my own materials for the contexts I was serving. Yet I was too busy in the trenches to do the “homework” I did for this dissertation and discover the underlying problems with these materials.

Around 2005, I became involved with a church plant that really afforded an opportunity to develop everything from scratch. This was my first experience in a church with no past or traditions to cling to. It was a wonderful adventure. The pastor commissioned me to put together some spiritual gifts discovery materials for this new congregation. That story is the opening story of my dissertation.

That was my last attempt to use the old wineskin of “spiritual gifts tests.” People were going through my new program and were still confused about their spiritual gifts and where to serve. We were plugging them where we needed them anyway, because we were consumed by the urgency to get some basic programs and services going in our new church. Beyond that, something much bigger was going on in the “big-C” Church. The new “missional” bandwagon was taking over the stage from the “every-member-ministry” bandwagon of the late twentieth century. One day I woke up feeling hit over the head with an epiphany: “All this time I’ve been focusing on equipping and mobilizing members for ministry in the church—and God wants us to be continuing Jesus’ ministry in the world.” It moves me deeply every time I think about how small and church-focused my vision has been.

With all this in my background I dove into my dissertation, setting out to answer some questions I’d been consciously or unconsciously harboring for decades. How did the church become this way in the first place? What did “ministry” amount to when Jesus and his disciples were wandering around before there was a church to go to? If I get to
the bottom of that, will that tell me anything about how we might be able to correct
today’s Church’s ministry orientation from inward to outward? Why don’t spiritual gifts
tests work? What are spiritual gifts anyway? Have we missed the boat somewhere? Why
don’t people see themselves as 24/7 ministers? Could it be that people still see “ministry”
as only something they do at church or for other Christians?

Finally, where is the Holy Spirit in all this? After all, isn’t the Holy Spirit
supposed to be our complete source of direction and empowerment for continuing Jesus’
ministry? How come I see a lot more “talk” than “walk” regarding the Holy Spirit? Do
most Christians really understand what it means that the Holy Spirit is within them and
the Kingdom of God is within them? Oh, and the Kingdom—that’s another huge, rather
trendy subject just now, but it proved to be central to everything once I got rolling.

I will be piloting the curriculum I wrote in fall 2010, so I am not in a position to
analyze its efficacy in depth. I am certain it contains new topics and ideas that will
challenge long-time and brand-new Christ-followers alike, to grow in ways the old
spiritual gifts discovery programs of the last few decades did not. Ultimately, I hope it
proves effective in mobilizing Christ-followers in Kingdom ministry—that’s the whole
point.

Even as I developed the curriculum, it turned out longer than I wanted it to be.
Peoples’ attention spans and commitment levels are so short and nominal these days. I
suspect that there is enough material in each lesson for double the conventional meeting
length I envision of ninety minutes. Since I do not want people to cut short either the
Bible-study process, the ministry discernment process, or prayer, I expect I will make
some radical adjustments following my pilot run with my first group. Along those lines, I
would like to experiment with setting the content and practical application exercises into some other more condensed vehicles such as a workshop, weekend retreat, new members class and the like. I will have to see how compromising on time invested compromises the overall process and make some hard decisions on what to omit.

Starting with the earthly ministry of Jesus and looking back over centuries of church history humbly reminds me of what an infinitesimally small offering this proposed “solution” is. But I’m joining the movement of the Spirit in this moment, and hoping to contribute a useful new tool to mobilize Christ-followers in Kingdom Ministry—service in Jesus’ name and the Spirit’s power—that embodies God’s Kingdom in their both their church and the everyday world they encounter.


