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Elder-At-The-Fire: Missional Generativity

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

ELDER-AT-THE-FIRE:
MISSIONAL GENERATIVITY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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DEPARTMENT OF MINISTRY

BY

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George Fox Evangelical Seminary
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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All biblical quotations are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

This project is dedicated to the memory of:

My grandmother, Mary E. Wiley,
a woman whose life exemplified Missional Generativity;
a true Elder-at-the-Fire

My father, Frank J. Wiley,
who always believed in me and encouraged me in
my educational pursuits

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ABSTRACT

Societies and cultures are changing at an unprecedented pace. In this time of uncertainty, how does the Church continue to advance God's kingdom and nurture fully mature disciples of Christ? This paper will show that global shifts demand a new type of Christian leader—*Elder-at-the-Fire*—who is able to apprentice others to a life of *Missional Generativity*.¹

The so-called 'proven' forms of discipleship are becoming ineffective. People in the world are floundering to understand their purpose; many seek spiritual guides and self-help solutions in search of spiritual meaning. In biblical times and in ancient tribal traditions, elders provided spiritual wisdom for life's journey. This project introduces the metaphor of Elder-at-the-Fire as a way to distinguish the special role Elders play when they become authentic agents of Missional Generativity through the power of the Spirit.

The first section probes the effects of rapid societal changes on the Church's ability to produce fully mature disciples that are both missional and generative. The second section identifies and examines current praxes for spiritual development and growth. Section three postulates the need for Elders-at-the-Fire and describes Missional Generativity as a distinguishing characteristic Elders should achieve to successfully apprentice disciples and promulgate the Kingdom. Finally, section four establishes the foundation for a proposed book by laying out the andragogic of developing Elders-at-the-Fire, the needed catalysts for implementing true Missional Generativity.

¹ Generativity is "a concern for establishing and guiding the next generation." John Kotre, "Generativity and the Generative Process," *Lives, Memories, Legacies, Stories*, accessed December 2, 2004, <http://www.johnkotre.com/generativity.htm>. Missional Generativity will be defined in this paper.

SECTION I: PROBLEM

Introduction

On a warm summer day on the Oregon coast, a young girl played in the shallow waters of the ocean. She dared not venture out as far as her brothers; she could not swim. She played close to the shore, splashing through the water with her head down looking for seashells, her dad and grandparents not far away so she could call out to them and display her findings. Without warning, a sneaker wave knocked the child down, tumbling her body and pulling her out to sea. Frantic, she tried to gain footing in the shifting sands of the ocean floor. She could not scream for help; the cold, salty water had rushed into her mouth and nose, threatening to fill her lungs. As her body was pummeled by the waves, she struggled to gasp for air. Her six-year-old mind cried out to her Sunday School Jesus ... the wave let her go. Sputtering and crying she ran to her father, “Daddy, I almost drowned, did you not see me?”

This story is rewritten in various scenarios in churches around the world. Individuals, while seeking spiritual treasures, are caught unaware by the waves of life and tossed about; some are even lost at sea.

Ms. Gleeson had a passion for teaching and a love for children. Her Sunday school class of fifth and sixth graders was one of the most vibrant classes in the church. Younger children could not wait to be promoted to her class and older ones often came back to visit. Her enthusiasm for teaching shone through, as did her ability to build relationships with each student regardless of their socio-economic level, cultural background, and personality type. She did more than teach: she mentored and modeled,

but most importantly she shared personal life stories that illustrated her spiritual growth and related her lessons learned to the young minds she was teaching. She also challenged each student to teach a class under her guidance.

Ms. Gleeson showed great promise of becoming a future spiritual elder when she achieved maturity. The church leaders were ecstatic when she announced her desire to join a mission organization and held a special commissioning service to send her off. Her educational degree and experience, along with her testimony, met the qualifications of the mission board. Happily she entered her new role as a missionary teacher.

More than ten years passed when the author met Ms. Gleeson again and invited her to speak to a women's group. Her love for children and teaching was still apparent, as was her Christian faith, but it was shocking to discover that her maturity level had not progressed and, in fact, she appeared to be suffering from some sort of malaise. Insecurity had replaced confidence; her sense of identity seemed lost, and her passion reduced to dying embers. Instead of offering vibrancy she appeared weary and worn; even her stories lacked the animation and enthusiasm they once held. Her body language seemed to say, "I'm drowning, can you not see me?"

During his college years Adam found a great church to attend. Members of the congregation were inviting and friendly; many families took him under their wing and he made friends with older men who took an interest in his life and served as the father he had lost at a young age. As valedictorian of his high school graduating class, he excelled in his college studies, but he often turned to the men of the church for counsel with personal struggles. Adam's gregarious personality, intelligence, and his burgeoning desire to serve God indicated that he would become a leader in the church. Prior to the

completion of his bachelor's degree in sociology, Adam felt a calling to become a pastor and enrolled in seminary after graduating.

True to the promise he showed, Adam became a pastor loved by his congregation and community. He took a special interest in helping younger people grow and find God's direction for their life. He sought out individuals and spoke to them about critical areas in their lives, often revealing information that could only have come at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and attempted to guide them into decisions which would move their lives in the right direction. Adam was well on his way to becoming a spiritual elder to those he pastored until an indiscretion cost him his ministerial license and his family. Scorned and abandoned by his denominational leaders, after more than 19 years of ministry he left the ministry and ironically began to sell life insurance. Now, more than 20 years later, he is retired after a productive career in other areas, but his passion and calling were buried beneath the waves of despair.

Angela grew up in a Christian home; her parents, grandparents, and great grandparents had all been extensively involved in the ministry of the church. With her heritage and spiritual training in the home, it was no surprise when she felt God's calling on her life for ministry. After completing Bible College and Seminary, she married and became a pastor's wife, a natural transition in her life which offered her the opportunity to use her gifts in the areas of education, training, and music. Angela's giving nature plunged her into the work of the church, often over-extending her resources and wearing her out. After several years of caring for a family, working outside the home and church, and ministering within the church, Angela felt that her spiritual reservoir was nearing empty.

Angela often sought out other pastor's wives for counsel, the ones she respected and who appeared to have achieved greater levels of spiritual maturity. However, she was frequently disappointed when the matter at hand had to do with deeper spiritual concerns. The pastor's wives were helpful in providing advice on raising children, making day-to-day life decisions, and other surface-level issues, but tended to avoid areas of spiritual depth. During a desperate time of her life, Angela approached a pastor's wife who was highly regarded in the conference, only to be turned aside with, "Dear, you are probably starting to go through the change of life and your emotions are just in turmoil. Don't worry about it!" Angela attended a pastor's wives' retreat and noticed this same dilemma when another pastor's wife asked the tough questions but received no help.

Angela thought back to her younger years in the church; it seemed people took more personal interest in her and were willing to listen and provide advice then, but once she attained her degrees and status as a pastor's wife she was given a set of unwritten rules to live by. Pastors and their wives advised her to maintain only superficial friendships with parishioners and strongly counseled her against confiding in lay people or developing close relationships, even though the lay person might be a spiritual giant. In essence, Angela was placed on a pedestal to act as a model. Although her spiritual leaders verbally encouraged her to grow in her spiritual faith, in actions she felt she was no longer allowed to show weakness or need for growth—she had arrived, she was the example, she was the leader ... except, Angela knew different. Thus, Angela began her own lonely search, swimming against the current, determined to reach the shore.

The stories above are all true, but the names have been changed. There are many more stories the author could relate, and central to each story is the question, "Where are

the spiritual elders to lead the way?” In the stories above, each individual showed great promise and had the appropriate qualifications through education, experience, passion, and testimony to become vibrant disciples of Christ used to further disciple others, but along the way each fell into various levels of despair. It appears that once they achieved their ‘ministry qualifications’ they were sent out to sea alone, with no one along to help navigate. Like the little girl in the ocean, a sneaker wave caught them, and the elders on the shore were so caught up in their own lives they missed the hand frantically waving from the sea, “I’m drowning, don’t you see?”

Global, societal, and cultural shifts demand a new type of leader, one who not only discipled effectively, but apprentices future leaders to sustain a highly adaptable and generative discipleship culture. This paper will show that global shifts call for a new type of Christian leader—*Elder-at-the-Fire*—who is able to apprentice others to a life of *Missional Generativity*.

Tesarac!

*Then the Lord spoke to Job out of
the storm ... ‘Brace yourself ...’
(Job 38:1a, 3a)*

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina breached the man-made levy, crashing into the shores of Louisiana and Mississippi, altering their landscape and causing destruction, death, and displacement. Prior to this devastation, scientists and emergency managers repeatedly counseled local and national authorities about the impending threat to New Orleans and other coastal towns. “That their heroic efforts failed is the result of

ignorance, bad decisions, and a sorry lack of leadership.”¹ This type of natural disaster provides an appropriate metaphor for one of the current maladies affecting the world and the American Church² leaders who have not effectively been disciplined to lead through hurricanes of change. However, this need not be the case. Scripture provides an example of a storm in which a house remains strong because it was built upon the rock, not sinking sand (Mt. 7:24-29). This metaphor is appropriate as well to the development of Christian leaders, and emphasizes the need for leaders who not only disciple effectively, but who can also apprentice future leaders to carry forward an adaptable and highly generative discipleship culture.

The world is in the midst of an escalating global political, religious, and cultural super-storm which will affect the permanence and solidity of all institutional and social structures. Navigating a storm of this enormity necessitates innovative forecasting and navigational tools, and leaders who are willing to jump into and ride out the storm to find a way to lead others to safety.

Authors Bridger and Lewis introduced the term *Tesarac*, attributed to author and poet, Shel Silverstein, to describe this super-storm. A Tesarac refers to “periods in history when momentous social and cultural changes occur. During a Tesarac, society becomes increasingly chaotic and confusing before reorganizing itself in ways that no one can

¹ John McQuaid and Mark Schleifstein, *Path of Destruction: The Devastation of New Orleans and the Coming Age of Superstorms*, 1st ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2006), xiii.

² The Church, as referenced in this paper, refers to the generic body of Christ as it meets together in localized settings. It is not representative of any one church or denomination, but inclusive of all churches in America.

accurately predict or easily anticipate.”³ Bridger and Lewis claim that Silverstein believed the changes which occur when a society journeys through the Tesarac are “so profound that nobody born one side of this ‘wrinkle in time’ will ever be able to understand fully what life was like before it occurred.”⁴

A Tesarac is a change-event in which time, space, and knowledge, and social, economic, and cultural structures seemingly collide and erupt into a spiraling whirlwind, fragmenting that which is familiar and creating an ever-widening chasm between “what is known” and “what is to be.” The Tesarac is both a destructive and a creative force. As with any storm, it is random and volatile, and its course is unpredictable. The Church cannot escape the current global Tesarac. Churches that are moored in tradition due to fear or unwillingness to change will either languish in a perpetual state of despair or die.

Some of the issues in the present Tesarac, which have direct bearing on the American Church, include the following: a sense of impermanence or transiency; permeable borders, both physical and virtual, which allow for thoughts and values to cross borders that once were solid; increasing tolerance and acceptance of other worldviews and religions; rising interest in spirituality and spiritual quests that may encompass and assimilate multiple religions; widening gaps between religious and cultural ideologies; altered acceptance of divergent moral and ethical standards; economic depression, expanding the chasm between the rich and the poor; decreased sense of personal and national security; life lived more in public space and less in private; heightened stress due to global events; escalating random shootings, terrorism, and

³ David Lewis and Darren Bridger, *The Soul of the New Consumer: Authenticity—What We Buy and Why in the New Economy* (London: Nicholas Brealey Pub., 2000), 1.

⁴ Ibid.

threats of persecution; shifting balance of economic and political power; and growing recognition of the plight of the poor along with an upsurge in humanitarian response. This list is not exhaustive, but represents many of the challenges with which the American Church is faced. Additionally, there is a shift in Christianity's demographic population growth away from the United States and other westernized countries toward Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

“In massive historical shifts, the very structure of knowing changes—not ‘what’ we know, but ‘how’ we know.”⁵ Ensnared in modern-day's conveniences and comforts—counterfeit storm shelters—one is easily desensitized to the shifting gales of change and establishes a false feeling of refuge. “The trappings of modern life mislead us; they can create the appearance of security, making still-dangerous places feel positively cozy. The way we see danger often diverges from the reality of risk.”⁶ When this illusion is exposed, individuals attempt to hang onto the relics of what they have known in fear of the unknown.

These issues are like the waves that threatened to overcome the disciples on the stormy sea. Tossed about and fearful of the raging waves and the wind swirling about them, their focus was on the storm and saving their boat (Mt 8:23-27). Human nature usually reacts in survival mode when a storm rages. In a Tetsunari, the Church needs leaders to be keenly aware of Christ's presence in the storm and to help guide others through the storm while keeping the Gospel message intact, recognizing Christ's sovereignty in the storm. This challenge is illustrated in Figure 1; the cyclonic effects of

⁵ Thomas Hohstadt, “Speaking Truth in a ‘Post-Modern World,’” Future Church, accessed February 19, 2006, <http://www.futurechurch.net/Article11.htm>.

⁶ McQuaid and Schleifstein, *Path of Destruction*, 68.

change can easily distort the message and change its meaning, preventing people from hearing the Gospel message correctly, or, in some cases, even hearing it at all.

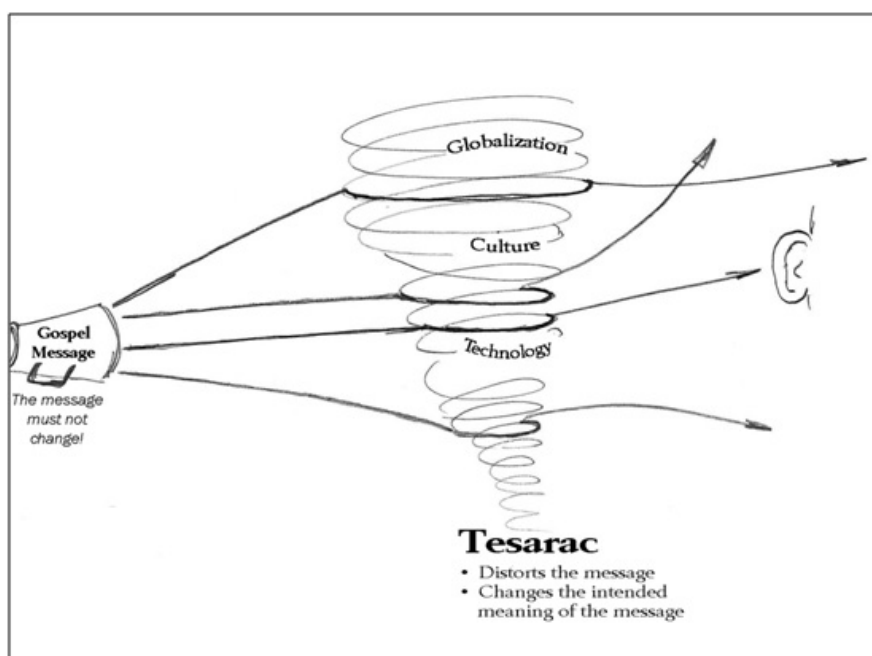


Figure 1 - Tesarac⁷

In addition, technological advances, social and cultural changes, and globalization opened the world to a diversity of open-sourced information sharing, thus expanding the knowledge base of information sources regardless of their source validity. These Tesarac shifts served as atmospheric storms, altering the cultural influences and structures in world societies, and catapulting the Church and her leaders into a spiraling vortex of uncertainty. Three unpredictable converging systems have collided and played a big part in throwing the Church off course. The Church and her leaders find themselves standing on the beach, while potential disciples are caught in the waves of the Tesarac and are drifting down shore or out to sea. The stranded leaders have been left wondering how to

⁷ Drawing created by the author's friend, Steve Robbins of St. Louis, MO, after a discussion regarding the Tesarac and its impact on the future of the Church.

reengage with the disciples. These three converging systems, battering the replication of steadfast and sound leaders in the Church, encompass technology, culture, and globalization.

Technology Storm

The opportunities and risks inherent in post-modernity are intensified by the availability of worldwide, instantaneous information exchange with few restrictions to user access. Many three-year-olds are now computer whizzes with instant-access information, easily digested in its visual format. In addition, an escalating blur between reality and virtual reality has created a culture that is desensitized to many of the moral and ethical ideologies of modernity and is reshaping the way people think, work, communicate, learn, and play.

The universality of technological communication tools has flattened borders and crossed thresholds once perceived as impenetrable. In turn, doors for international exchange of ideas, skills, commodities, and information are radically changing the ways in which individuals and organizations relate to one another, thus creating a worldwide network of open-sourced content and expanding knowledge sources. Despite the many benefits of such a global community, the availability of false religious teaching and a disturbing increase in uncensored adult-content sites present new challenges for the Church.

Social media has changed the face of relational interactions. Although the scope and activity of relationships and communication have increased via instant socially accessible tools, the range and depth of communication is often limited to information bytes of superficial activities rather than meaningful exchanges of conversation. Leisa

Reichelt, a User Experience Consultant, describes this type of social experience as *ambient intimacy*. “Ambient intimacy is about being able to keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn’t usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible. It’s not so much about meaning, it’s just about being in touch.”⁸ Ambient intimacy occurs from the panoramic of details and information bytes dropped via Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google+, and myriad others, where text messaging, mobile apps, and other forms of social media create a mood or pretention of intimacy with people with whom there may be little or no real relationship. Likewise, the Church has fallen prey to ambient intimacy, resulting in a phatic Christian message lacking depth and meaning that creates a sense of loneliness and abandonment. This level of intimacy has become so prevalent that it can easily carry over into all aspects of interpersonal relations, thus diminishing the ability for continued growth and development. Constant information byte exchange becomes an illusion of genuine community with others. The church needs to harvest a relationship nexus that allows for generative relationship building, essential to discipleship replication and leadership development.

Culture Storm

In a multi-year joint comprehensive study conducted by the Fuller and Schaeffer Institutes, detailed statistics and data covering a fifteen-year period were examined, with the conclusion that the “Church has become culturally irrelevant and even distant from its prime purpose of knowing Him, growing in Him, and worshipping Him by making

⁸ Leisa Reichelt, “Ambient Intimacy,” *Disambiguity* (blog), March 1, 2007, accessed June 12, 2011, <http://www.disambiguity.com/ambient-intimacy/>.

disciples.”⁹ This is not a surprising find, given the rapid changes that have buffeted life over the past century. Educational systems and workplaces have also struggled to keep afloat in the world’s ever-changing environment.

The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition defines culture as “the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization.”¹⁰ For centuries, cultures have defined the way in which people view and live their lives. Within each culture is a set of sub-cultures, generally with a set of acceptable mores by which one operates within the culture.

These shared patterns include a variety of variables which serve to define the cultural makeup and distinguish it from those of other cultural groups. Cultural variables include values, lifestyle choices, communication patterns, family and religious structures, complexity of life, consumerism, and a myriad of other beliefs, behaviors, and characteristics that work together to distinguish a particular culture.

An important issue with tremendous impact on the world is a rapid change in cultural mores. With the increasing upsurge of mass media’s influence, pop culture has heavily influenced the quantum swell of cultural change. In addition, an ever-increasing overload of information and choices buffet the mind and challenge personal and moral values. Individuals and groups are onslaught with a barrage of media products, images, ideals, and concepts. The magnitude, intensity, and variety of changes have accelerated so fast that they have disturbed the cultural psyche on an unprecedented level. The

⁹ Richard Krejcir, “Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline,” Schaeffer Institute, accessed March 24, 2011, <http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/?articleid=36557>.

¹⁰ “What Is Culture?” University of Minnesota: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, accessed April 23, 2012, <http://www.carla.umn.edu/culture/definitions.html>.

“qualitative difference between this and all previous lifetimes is ... a stream of change so accelerated that it influences our sense of time, revolutionizes the tempo of daily life, and affects the very way we ‘feel’ the world around us.”¹¹

One of the roles of culture is to establish a sense of identity and shared values.

The fast-paced changes influencing the world’s society have essentially pulled off a scam of massive identity theft, leaving people and institutions feeling insecure and disoriented.

Earlier in human history, in slow-changing traditional societies buffered from outside influences, people’s lives usually expressed and fulfilled what they believed and valued. ... Their lives flowed rather directly along the paths laid out by their understanding of the world, and it all made sense. But as the modern world emerged, the pace of change accelerated. With the rise of scientific and technological worldviews, and with the movement of people to cities to participate in the market economy, life paths diverged more and more from what people valued.¹²

In a cultural storm, such as the modern world is experiencing, cultural identity becomes confused, lost, and bewildered, creating a society of cultural nomads. This malady has struck church leaders as well in the mission to “go and make disciples” (Mt 28:19). Lewis and Cordeiro write, “Your culture is the lens through which you view your life. If you change the lens, you change your outlook. Change the culture and everything else changes, including your future.”¹³

Reminiscent of the Israelites’ drastic adjustment from living in slavery to freedom, so also have the rapid and varied cultural changes caused a sense of disorientation for the world today. Like the wandering and complaining Israelites, many

¹¹ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam, 1990), 17.

¹² Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* (New York: Harmony Books, 2000), 47.

¹³ Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 10.

today are either seeking to recapture the Egypt of their past or exploring alternate paths in hopes of finding a Promised Land. This innate desire for a Promised Land has not been lost on marketers, politicians, church leaders, and others who, in their own particular way, shower empty promises of better health, wealth, eternal life, or eternal youth. Further, the offspring of these cultural nomads find themselves in a society without guides to point the way to the true North Star. Such guides, who functioned as the tribal elders of old, pass on their accumulated wisdom and experiences to help others in their battle against the storm's challenges, and in so doing transfer truth and core values of the past in refreshing and relevant ways that will be clearly understood, adopted, and fully integrated into the hearts and minds of the next generation. This type of elder (not elder as in a position or church office) offers the ability to apprentice new leaders who can acculturate the Truth into future generations.

The desire to maintain a sense of familiarity, along with the fear of change and the discomfort it may cause, often paralyzes individuals and organizations; they become content, settling rather than progressing.

Many people are either unwilling or unable to suffer the pain of giving up the outgrown which needs to be forsaken. Consequently, they cling, often forever, to their own patterns of thinking and behaving, thus failing to negotiate any crisis, to truly grow up and to experience the joyful sense of rebirth that accompanies the successful transition into greater maturity.¹⁴

Churches moored in tradition, that jump from one quick-fix program to the next, or that implement trendy programs and effects in an effort to be relevant will either languish in a perpetual state of confusion or despair, or die.

¹⁴ M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth*, 25th ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 71.

“The cultural epicenter of a church is not a static code of rules, but life-on-life equipping that ultimately allows a person or team you trust to apply biblical principles to your specific context.”¹⁵ Re-establishing a sense of cultural equilibrium is critical to developing the Christian identity and essential to promoting the Kingdom of God. Life-on-life equipping is a fundamental role for leaders in apprenticing other leaders to firmly establish their identity in Christ in order to be effective disciplers of others.

Globalization Storm

While globalization is a fairly recent phenomenon, the concept of interacting with all humanity is not new. Many Old Testament scriptures make reference to “declaring to the whole world” or “nations” the glory of God. That theme is continued and refined in the New Testament with the Great Commission mandate to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mk 16:15). This command has become the central mission and vision of the Church. Stimulated by advances in technology, travel, and communication, globalization has opened the floodgates for spreading the Christian message with increased speed and through more means than in any previous time in history, thereby providing access to nations and cultures once difficult to penetrate. This element of the Tesarac challenges Christian leaders to tap into the authority and power by which Jesus commissioned his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 and to seek and abide in his promised presence until the end of time.

British socialist Anthony Giddens describes globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local

¹⁵ Lewis and Cordeiro, *Culture Shift*, 20.

happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”¹⁶ New York Times columnist and best-selling author Thomas Friedman states that globalization is “the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before—in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before.”¹⁷ Simply stated, globalization can be defined as “the widening, intensifying, speeding up, and growing impact of world-wide interconnectedness.”¹⁸ Definitions for globalization abound, and most are described with metaphors related to themes of accelerated speed, intensification, whirlwind forces, and global storms, all on a scale unprecedented, themes which can all be summed up in one word—Tesarac—an increasingly chaotic period characterized by changes so vast that they disorient and overwhelm society.

While many view globalization as a process to develop free trade and integrate a global economy, its impact is now recognized as having extended to the financial, political, communication, and social arenas, particularly via use of the internet and telecommunications technologies. While not as broadly recognized, the effects of globalization also have a major influence on the Church and its mission, presenting new opportunities and fresh challenges.

Even though globalization has effectively interconnected nations and cultures, the pace at which change has been generated has swiftly exceeded the rate by which most people are able to process and assimilate change. Inherent to any change are risk,

¹⁶ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 64.

¹⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 7.

¹⁸ David Held et al., “What Is Globalization?” *Global Transformations*, accessed March 26, 2012, <http://www.polity.co.uk/global/whatisglobalization.asp#whatis>.

resistance, and a sense of disequilibrium, resulting in feelings of loss of identity, emotional fatigue or depression, and a sense of hopelessness for or lack of trust in the future. Despite the positive advancements wrought by globalization, it has also exacerbated the issues described above, resulting in a sense of bewilderment for many organizations and leaders which produces an underlying feeling that “no one is at the wheel; in fact there is no wheel, no steering mechanism at all.”¹⁹ In essence, the same force that interconnected the world has also fostered a disconnect in the Church’s understanding as to how to integrate the effects of change into their mission to make disciples, let alone how to become a change-agent in the midst of the Tesarac.

The ability for a church leader to communicate the Gospel message and effectively disciple others is limited by the leader’s understanding of the numerous influences brought about by globalization. These influences are diverse, often complex, and not readily understandable due to the velocity and constancy of new technological, economic, cultural, and societal changes. Taken alone, each issue may be easy to pinpoint and address; however, the problem becomes compounded due to multiple issues erupting and colliding simultaneously. These colliding forces are creating a cultural atmospheric pressure that is highly unstable, thus challenging the norms which once provided a sense of security and identity. Catarina Kinnvall, Political Science Professor at Lund University, aptly describes the feeling this generates and to which the Church has fallen prey:

A globalized world is for many a world devoid of certainty, of knowing what tomorrow holds. It is a world where many people feel intensified levels of

¹⁹ William Cavanaugh, “Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk: Mobility and Identity in a Global Age,” *Theological Studies* 69, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 340, accessed April 27, 2012, <http://0-www.proquest.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/>.

insecurity as the life they once led is being contested and changed at the same time. Globalization challenges simple definitions of who we are and where we come from.²⁰

In essence, globalization's aftermath on the Church has the same impact as a storm altering the landscape of a seashore. The sea is still there, but its shoreline may have moved, its appearance changed, or it may be uninhabitable in the same way it was before. This presents a challenge for leaders to reassess their role in the face of an entirely new landscape and to rely upon the certainty of Christ's message and example in developing disciples for furthering the Kingdom.

The polarity intrinsic to the malady created by the converging systems in the current Tesarac is that, while it presents an incredible positive prospect for the Church's mission, it also creates a form of malaise in the Church and her leaders. The modes and methods of the Church are being challenged. In response, some churches continue to hold on to their old patterns and methods, while others strive to adapt by incorporating more technology or social trends in an effort to be relevant to society. Few have sought to understand and work within the midst of change. The danger with the first two methods is that too much focus on the system or approach often diminishes the life-changing message of the Church; the very thing it was mandated to impart. An alternate response to the Tesarac's global societal and cultural shifts demands leaders who are not only able to disciple effectively, but who can also apprentice future leaders in the midst of the storm to carry on a generative discipleship culture.

²⁰ Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security." *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (October 2004): 742, accessed April 27, 2012, *Business Source Complete*, EBSCOhost.

The importance of developing an alternate response is highlighted in understanding the impact the Tesarac's waves have had in weakening the Church's understanding and confidence in its relevance in today's culture.

Tesarac Impact

A new noesis marks current-day thought processes, spawning creativity while at the same time exposing the world to new perils that make this Tesarac age more unpredictable than any past societal or cultural changes. Within the Church and society, the Tesarac has intensified, illustrated by a complete reorganization of how the world views Christianity and its importance in society. Stuart Murray describes it as "a culture in which central features of the Christian story are unknown and churches are alien institutions whose rhythms do not normally impinge on most members of society."²¹

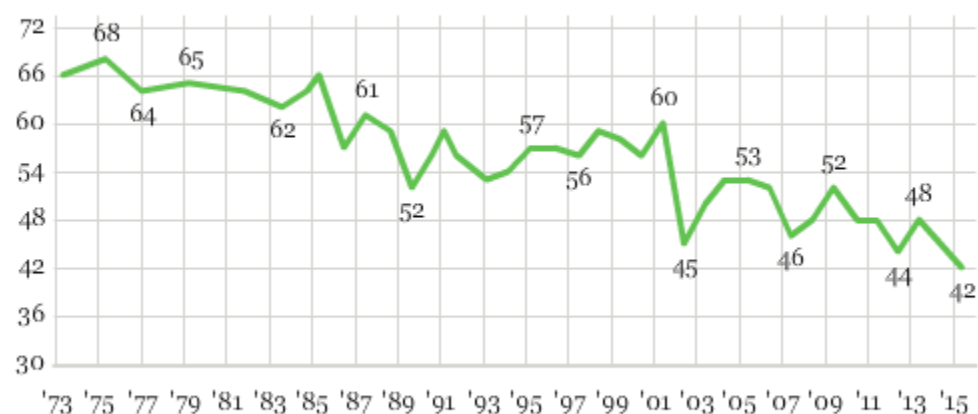
Complacency, delusion, obliviousness, flaccidity, and apathy are a few of the adjectives that characterize the nature of the Western Christian Church. The desire for a peaceful, entertaining, and comfortable environment pervades the attitude of many established congregations and any whisper of change is a threat to their security. Unfortunately, this blinds them to the real threat to which they are in imminent danger. Rather than risk chaos and creativity that moves them from their comfort zone, the Church further anchors itself to broken or obsolete structures. Those which engage in endeavors to reinvent the church often succeed in only remaking the same problems in a different context; few have adequately changed the context and landscape of the church

²¹ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World, After Christendom* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2004), 1.

in such a way that it results in a dynamic and fluid momentum for cultivating generative leaders as disciples who will sustain through the Tesarac.

A recent Gallup poll illustrates America's weakening confidence in organized religion, indicating an alarming twenty-nine percent decrease since 1975 (Figure 2).²² The graph indicates a small upward spike of confidence in 2001 followed by a dramatic dip, which may be associated with the 9/11 attack on America and the Church's unpreparedness to adequately respond.

Percentage of Americans With a "Great Deal"/"Quite a Lot" of Confidence in the Church/Organized Religion



GALLUP

Figure 2 - Declining Confidence in Organized Religion

While confidence in organized religion does not reflect directly on the issue of developing leaders to disciple others, there may be a correlation. An earlier Gallup report states that while 56 percent of Americans indicate religion is very important to them, 76 percent of respondents believe that the influence the Church has on American lives is

²² "Religion: Confidence in Religion at New Low, but Not Among Catholics," Gallup, June 17, 2015, accessed October 20, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/183674/confidence-religion-new-low-not-among-catholics.aspx>.

steadily declining.²³ The author believes that this felt decline of influence can be attributed to a lack of spiritual maturity in today's Christian leaders who are not equipped to effectively demonstrate their faith in their home life, schools, marketplace, and workplace. This viewpoint is supported by George Gallup, Jr. in an address he gave at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary:

Surveys reveal an unprecedented desire for religious and spiritual growth among people in all walks of life and in every region of the nation. There is an intense searching for spiritual moorings, a hunger for God. It is for churches to seize the moment and to direct this often vague and free-floating spirituality into a solid and lived-out faith. The key is ... too many pastors naively assume that church members know and understand the core doctrines of their own faith. ... Someone has to challenge people to be true disciples of Christ. ... Someone has to ask the hard questions. If we don't talk about the whole dimension of sin, repentance, grace and forgiveness, what is the faith all about? What are we doing? ... Without true discipleship, the church can simply turn into a social services agency.²⁴

Despite efforts to reach current cultures, many churches are failing at being relevant to the cultural make-up and needs of the diverse social and cultural structures created by the Tesarac. The Tesarac has made it difficult to accurately read the culture and inculcate it into their ministry. This cultural irrelevance, combined with a society trained by media and consumerism to be self-absorbed, has engendered feelings of lack of purpose or direction, and engendered apathy or lack of trust in the Church, resulting in a declining interest in the institutionalized church, lack of faith in the future, and lack of a true Christian identity. In conjunction with these feelings there is a growing interest in seeking spirituality through self-help books and websites, spiritual guides, life coaches or other mentors, or gurus, in a search for meaning. In addition, many have developed an

²³ "Religion," Gallup, accessed October 20, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>.

²⁴ Terry Mattingly, "Gallup On Statistics and Discipleship," Virtue Online: The Voice for Global Orthodox Anglicanism, accessed July 28, 2012, <http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=1104#.UBRfTrSe64I>.

interest in participating in local and global humanitarian efforts, displaying a felt need to be of use to the world.

Futurist Alvin Toffler advocates that survival is dependent on adaptability and increased competencies, and in order to survive, it is imperative that an individual “search out totally new ways to anchor himself, for all the old roots—religion, nation, community, family, or profession—are now shaking under the hurricane impact of the accelerative thrust.”²⁵ The Church has not been given the choice to opt out of the Tesarac; therefore, it must seek ways to survive through and outlive the storm.

Effective Tesarac leaders, and the Church, will concentrate on persevering through this accelerative thrust by faith—a faith, as described in Hebrews 11:1, that God will accomplish his will even if the future is unseen. In essence, living in the eye of the storm, Christian leadership must seek God’s presence within the unknown and move forward with *veriditas*, a passion fueled with fire and energy that unleashes a counter-storm of life-giving creativity and restores vitality and life to the Church. It is the counter-storm that holds the secret of the redemptive promise within the storm.

Moses provides an example of a leader thrust into a Tesarac; with the awesome responsibility of leading God’s people to a new land, Moses persevered in his calling, relying on the omniscient God for guidance and sustenance. Along the journey, Moses became an elder to Joshua, training him to trust in God and to succeed him in leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. Moses commissioned Joshua with these words: “Be strong and courageous, for you must go with the people into the land ... The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you” (Deut. 31:7-8). These words are also a

²⁵ Toffler, *Future Shock*, 35.

challenge for today's Christian Tesarac leaders. Like Moses, the Church needs elders who will essentially 'go with' and apprentice new leaders for ministry in a new land.

As the Israelites in Moses' time cried out to God for deliverance; so too, the New Testament Jews were waiting and looking for a redemptive leader at the time Jesus entered the world. However, Jesus not only entered a Tesarac, his life and ministry created a Tesarac. Knowing what lay ahead, Jesus chose and apprenticed twelve apostles to prepare them for ministry to go into the world and make new disciples. The Tesarac through which Jesus guided his apostles was unprecedented, culminating with his death, resurrection, and exaltation at the right hand of God. The Jesus Tesarac tore the veil and, in doing so, released his apprentices to do greater works than he had done (Jn. 14:12).

Much of Jesus' ministry was spent at Galilee. He was familiar with the winds and storms which frequently assaulted the Sea of Galilee, and it was from these very shores that he called some of his disciples. Likewise, it is from within the Tesarac he is calling for new leaders to join him in the storm to apprentice men and women and to extend the great commission to new generations.

SECTION II: OTHER SOLUTIONS

*“Go and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the
Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey everything
I have commanded you.”
—Jesus (Mt 28:19-20)*

The American Church finds itself in the middle of a period in which significant social and cultural transformations are occurring at a rapid pace; this period can be referred to as a Tesarac. The previous section examined this phenomenon and its influence on the Church’s inability to effectively transition leaders to be disciplers of new leaders for the future. The present Tesarac offers an opportunity for the Church to reassess and reorganize to be more effective disciple-makers in this rapidly changing culture. In *Leadership and the New Science*, Margaret Wheatley advocates that “the things we fear most in organizations—disruptions, confusion, chaos—need not be interpreted as signs that we are about to be destroyed. Instead, these conditions are necessary to awaken creativity.”¹ In the midst of a rapidly changing culture, it is important that the Church assesses the effects of the cultural changes in which it resides in order to creatively identify ways to effectively disciple others within its culture. This challenge necessitates a new type of leader, Elder-at-the-Fire, a spiritual guide who apprentices new disciple-makers and generatively extends through the Tesarac.

The English word “disciple” originated from the Latin term *discipulus*, meaning “pupil.” This term was originally derived from the Greek noun, *mathetes*, meaning

¹ Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 21.

“learner” or “adherent.” The Hebrew equivalent to this term is *talmid*, also meaning “pupil” or “taught one.” Michael Wilkins, New Testament professor of language and literature, further delineates the root meaning by explaining that in Hellenistic Greek literature this root term was used “with a technical sense to refer to an ‘adherent’ of a great teacher, teaching or master.”² In this aspect, the master played a formative role in how a disciple followed by placing an “emphasis upon dependency, life-commitment, and the ongoing nature of the relationship.”³ A disciple is a student or apprentice who not only follows the teachings of a leader, but absorbs the teaching in order to become deeply rooted in those teachings. Scripture refers to a disciple as one who imitates his or her teacher (Mt. 10:24; Jn. 8:31, 15:3-8; Lk. 6:40). Jesus’ invitation to Andrew and Simon (Peter) to follow him established himself as a disciple-maker by promising to teach them how to become “fishers of men” (Mt 4:18-20). Later Jesus uses the imperative *matheteuo* in his instruction to “make disciples” (Mt. 28:19).

When attaching the suffix “ship” to “disciple,” the term speaks about the ongoing status or condition of being and becoming a disciple of someone.⁴ The Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root from which “ship” is derived is the word “shape.”⁵ This adds another dimension to discipleship, indicating the involvement of a shaping or forming process. In this context, being a disciple “implies the existence of a personal attachment

² Michael J. Wilkins, *Supplements to Novum Testamentum*, vol. 59, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel: as Reflected in the Use of the Term [mathētēs]* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 41.

³ Ibid., 12.

⁴ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 35.

⁵ *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “-ship,” accessed December 20, 2013, http://etymonline.com/index.php?term=-ship&allowed_in_frame=0.

which shapes the whole life of the one described as μαθητής [*mathētēs* - disciple], and which in its particularity leaves no doubt as to who is deploying the formative power.”⁶ A disciple of Jesus, then, becomes like him by the working of his transforming power.

Jesus’ calling of the disciples initiates them into a discipleship relationship whereby they learn to emulate and carry forward Jesus’ teachings, not just through transfer of information but by “imitating the teacher’s life, inculcating his values, and reproducing his teachings.”⁷ In this way, discipleship becomes a continuous relational journey with the disciple. Philosophy professor and Christian author Dallas Willard describes the meaning of discipleship and its relational component. “Discipleship is the relationship I stand into Jesus Christ in order that I might take on his character. As his disciple, I am learning from him how to live my life in the Kingdom as he would if he were I. The natural outcome is that my behavior is transformed. Increasingly, I routinely and easily do the things he said and did.”⁸ Jesus explained his own discipleship when he told Jewish leaders that he does what he sees his Father do (Jn. 5:19, 30), thus providing an example of how the disciple should imitate the discipler.

One of Jesus’ discipling methods was to go among the people and use examples from their local environment, the traditions and customs, and their way of life to teach them in a manner that related to them on a personal level. Jesus’ ministry illustrates

⁶ Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:441.

⁷ Greg Herrick, “Go and Make Disciples of All Nations: Understanding the Meaning of the Term ‘disciple,’” Bible.Org, May 11, 2004, accessed May 15, 2013, <https://bible.org/seriespage/understanding-meaning-term-%E2%80%9CdDisciple%E2%80%9D>.

⁸ Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 16.

embracing the culture of the day while relating it to his message. Taking this approach with people revolutionized their lives; the Church should recalibrate accordingly.

Equally important is the Church's ability to recognize that reactionary solutions, particularly those programmatic in nature, are generally short-term and sometimes unproductive. In the author's experience, often a Church's search for solutions is a reaction to perceived problems within their local church body. When the Church perceives that its growth or lack thereof is attributed to a specific issue or area, it frequently employs a reactive response, which often leads to adopting a pre-existing programmatic solution.

However, when a solution is achieved through a body of believers in corporate prayer, soul searching, and waiting for divine inspiration, its impact is widespread.

Small Groups

The trend in small groups, sometimes referred to as cell or home groups, is an example of a solution which has sometimes been implemented by a reactionary decision. In a consultation setting with a local church, the church leaders conveyed to the author a previous experience trying to create a small group culture. Using a survey instrument, they identified that most respondents felt the church should make available small group opportunities. The church leaders scurried around securing materials and coercing individuals to be group leaders, but when the program rolled out very few people showed up and group participation was sporadic at best. The problem with their survey was that it asked the wrong questions, it did not ask who would be willing to participate, what level of participation they would engage in, what their expectations were for a small group, or—more important!—whether or not anyone felt prepared to lead a small group.

Additionally, no evaluation of spiritual readiness or training was provided to ensure group leaders would be effective in their role. Later, this same church used Rick Warren's popular study, *The Purpose Driven Life*, to establish small groups. Once again they set out on a quest to recruit leaders, this time assigning people who lived in the same geographic locality to participate in a specific group. Although it appeared to work for the duration of the study, the small groups fell apart shortly thereafter. Each time the church attempted to establish small groups, they achieved similar results.

For the most part, the decision to develop small groups was not made as a result of the Holy Spirit's directive or even the result of thoughtful analysis, but primarily because church leadership chose to emulate a trend seen in other churches they deemed successful. The author has observed this same reactionary approach in other churches that adopted a "cookie cutter" approach, replicating what they see but not necessarily addressing the underlying problem within their local congregation, the ability to effectively develop fully devoted disciples.

Church consultant Alan Danielson encountered the issue of small group effectiveness in consultations with churches. He asserts that:

Because we are victims of the "fast food mentality" in our culture we look for quick fixes and short cuts. Many churches and pastors are looking for a new small group model or approach that will yield faster results. Many are looking for a system for small groups that will run itself. Many are looking for ways to downplay the role of the "leader" in the small group itself. The problem with all of these hopes and desires is that they neglect the one thing that makes every small group model or approach work: leadership.⁹

⁹ Alan Danielson, "The Biggest Issue Facing Small Group Ministry," Church Leaders, accessed August 17, 2012, <http://www.churchleaders.com/smallgroups/small-group-blogs/149895-the-biggest-issue-facing-small-group-ministry.html>.

Many churches incorporate small groups without an intentional or consistent plan to disciple leaders with a goal for leading or mentoring for deeper discipleship. Brian Jones, founding pastor of Christ's Church of the Valley in Royersford, Pennsylvania, invited a nationally acclaimed pastor to provide consulting services to his church. Jones expressed to the consultant his dilemma in understanding how to make small groups work, upon which the consultant explained his opinion as to why many small groups fail:

Small groups are things that trick us into believing we're serious about making disciples. The problem is 90 percent of small groups never produce one single disciple. Ever. They help Christians make shallow friendships, for sure. They're great at helping Christians feel a tenuous connection to their local church, and they do a bang-up job of teaching Christians how to act like other Christians in the Evangelical Christian subculture. But when it comes to creating the kind of holistic disciples Jesus envisioned, the jury's decision came back a long time ago—small groups just aren't working.¹⁰

The effectiveness of small groups can be deceiving; even mega churches have discovered that their capacity in developing disciples is flawed. Greg Hawkins, executive pastor of Chicago's Willow Creek Church, had his perspective radically altered regarding Willow Creek's ability to fulfill their mission to make fully devoted followers of Christ. In 2003, the Willow Creek Church boasted a 200 percent increase in small group participation. Pastor Hawkins and other church leaders believed increased involvement in church activities was a major contributing factor to spiritual growth; however, upon receiving the results of a congregational survey, the data presented a much different picture. It took several weeks for church leadership to remove their blinders in order to understand the issues that became apparent in the analysis of data, including substantial evidence that they were not achieving their mission, and, in fact, many survey

¹⁰ Brian Jones, "Why Churches Should Euthanize Small Groups," Christian Standard, January 24, 2011, accessed March 14, 2011, <http://christianstandard.com/2011/01/why-churches-should-euthanize-small-groups/>.

respondents felt stalled in their spiritual lives.¹¹ Further studies exposed Willow Creek's lack of ministry in the area of instructing and guiding people in spiritual disciplines for personal growth.¹² This revelation led Pastor Hawkins to embark on an extensive research project, *Reveal*, which included six other churches. One of the key findings of this research indicated that "the church [is] too preoccupied with the early growing years, leaving the spiritual adolescents to find their own way—without preparing them for the journey."¹³ Despite the programs and activities Willow Creek provided, the discovery that they were not making deeper disciples, especially due to lack of a disciple-making culture in the church, was an eye-opener that altered the way they approached their mission.

The 'Achilles' heel of the modern-day small group movement is simple: Small groups don't create disciples; disciples create disciples. And modern-day small groups are led, for the most part, by people who have attended the church, had a conversion experience, led a reasonably moral life, and can read the study-guide questions, but are not disciples themselves.¹⁴

Former church consultant Thom Rainer claims that in his years of experience as a church consultant, churches which constantly started new small groups experienced increased numbers in church attendance; however, he further stated that one of the reasons churches fail to start new groups is due to lack of competent, trained leaders.¹⁵ A report published by the *Leadership Network and Hartford Institute for Religion* notes that

¹¹ Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 15-20.

¹² Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Resources, 2007), 73.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴ Jones, Why Churches Should Euthanize Small Groups.

¹⁵ Thom Rainer, "The Importance of Launching New Groups," Thom S. Rainer, May 15, 2013, accessed May 16, 2013, <http://thomrainer.com/2013/05/15/the-importance-of-launching-new-groups>.

82 percent of America's megachurches indicate that "small groups are 'central to our strategy of Christian nurture and spiritual formation.'"¹⁶ Although the report does not draw any conclusions regarding the effectiveness of small groups in developing disciples, survey statistics show that more than half of church attendees are not actively involved in a small group. This perhaps is an indicator, as Willow Creek found, that while small groups have some impact in increasing numbers and generating excitement in local churches, it may not have had any significant impact on the real problem—that churches are not being successful in making fully devoted disciples of Christ. By attempting to emulate the 'success' of another church, without fully understanding the dynamics and nuances of their success, they have been more successful in creating a social club atmosphere that brings people in, but sends them away with little spiritual value. Yet, not all is negative. This solution effectively addressed an underlying need for revitalization, moving the church to a place of renewed community and fellowship.

The importance of developing a discipleship ethos to develop future leaders has long been recognized by the American Church; however, within the Tetsarac many are recognizing that something more is needed. The evangelical Church has believed it has been 'disciple-making' by converting and teaching people about God, but in reality has failed to successfully launch disciples into an ongoing lifestyle of discipleship that continuously replicates itself into other leaders.

More and more, people are realizing we are in the midst of a discipleship crisis in the United States which is largely responsible for the state of the American church. At the same time, there is a wave of excitement about the current missional movement that has been bubbling up in the last 10-15 years that many

¹⁶ Warren Bird and Scott Thumma, "A New Decade of Megachurches: 2011 Profile of Large Attendance Churches in the United States," *Leadership Network*, 2011, 3, accessed May 17, 2013, <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/New-Decade-of-Megachurches-2011Profile.pdf>.

people are hoping will stop the bleeding. The fundamental issue, however, is that unless we are able to disciple people well like Jesus did, any missional movement is unsustainable.¹⁷

Church Programs

Churches have developed and implemented many programs that have been beneficial to the Church. A program can be defined as a planned itinerary or series of events or activities, usually designed for a specific outcome or to train someone to perform in a desired way (Webster's Dictionary and Dictionary.com). Programs are generally designed for a specific period of time or cyclical periods to obtain a specific goal, and are often delivered through curricula or another prescribed course of action. The danger inherent in programs is that the program may become more important than the purpose of the program. Over the years, many North American churches have 'programmed' rather than disciplined people. The result has been churches with more rote and static programs than growing disciples.

Jesus accused the Pharisees of being a programmed people (Mk 7:7-9, 13). The legal letter of the Law had become more important than the spirit of the Law. In an effort to preserve God's Law, the Pharisees established a safeguard of additional rules to act as a barrier to the Law. In this way, if one of the man-made laws were broken, the Law itself would not be violated. Their original intent was to make a way for God's people to succeed in honoring God with holiness. However, over time the Pharisees became overzealous in enforcing the man-made laws to the extent that these laws superseded the

¹⁷ "Discipleship and Mission Workshop." 3 Dimension Ministries, accessed March 18, 2012, http://www.3dministries.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=168310.

Law itself, thereby establishing a legalistic religion.¹⁸ This example is in stark contrast to those disciples who built a relationship with Jesus and internalized his message, whereby it became a part of their moral fiber.

A program that is fluid and remains centered in its purpose to further God's kingdom can be a valid solution when its focal point centers on the relational aspects of discipling. Such a program is often a catalyst in an individual's life for spiritual growth.

Many programs have had significant impact in the Church's ability to develop disciples. The Sunday School movement, originating in the 1780s, was initially established to educate England's poor, illiterate, working children. Using the Bible as the major source to teach reading, this educational program also served to inform the children about God and instill Christian values, which transformed many lives. True to the purpose of discipleship, the children were encouraged to return as a teacher upon their graduation. The concept of Sunday School rapidly spread and became one of the major life-changing programs of churches all over the world.¹⁹ Although the purpose and delivery of Sunday School has changed since its inception, this program continues to shape lives and provide an effective means for teaching God's Word and discipling children and adults through biblical teaching. Youth ministries, children's church, men's and women's programs, small group Bible studies, worship teams, evangelism teams, leadership development, and other adult ministries are all examples of programs the Church may use as a means to provide opportunities for disciple-making.

¹⁸ Herbert Lockyer Sr., ed., *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary: An Authoritative One-Volume Reference Work On the Bible, with Full-Color Illustrations* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), "Pharisees."

¹⁹ Timothy Larsen, "Christian History: When Did Sunday School Start?" Christianity Today, August 28, 2008, accessed July 29, 2012, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/asktheexpert/whendidsundayschoolstart.html>.

Discipleship programs teach basic Christian principles to the new or young Christian who has not had much exposure to the Truth, as well as help increase the knowledge in other believers and promote increased spiritual maturity. Many discipleship programs use denominational or other curricula, such as Navigators, The Purpose Driven Life, Omega Discipleship Ministries, G.R.O.W (God Reshaping Our Ways), LiveWay, and others that focus on discipleship or leadership. While the structured, programmatic environment often helps individuals develop disciplines in their life by committing to attend scheduled classes and completing assignments, the pre-scripted study program can also hinder leadership development. Dennis McCallum, author of *Organic Discipleship*, asserts that curriculum pre-sets the agenda of a meeting and “requires little creativity or expertise on the part of group leaders. Such lack of expertise points in turn to a weak equipping ministry in the church.”²⁰

Discipleship programs, whether one-on-one or in a group setting, are designed to call the Christian to a higher level of living in Christ. However, there is a growing awareness that discipleship programs are not accomplishing what they intended, despite the myriad of discipleship books, courses, and opportunities that exist. Jim Petersen, associate to the General Director of the Navigators, laments, “thirty years of discipleship programs, and we are [still] not discipled.”²¹ This statement, from one who spent his career in an organization dedicated to discipleship, affirms that the programmed model of discipleship is not producing mature disciples of Christ as expected.

²⁰ Dennis McCallum, “Eleven Reasons Why Home Fellowship Groups Usually Fail,” Xenos Christian Fellowship, accessed July 29, 2012, <http://www.xenos.org/classes/papers/10.htm>.

²¹ Jim Peterson, *Lifestyle Discipleship: The Challenge of Following Jesus in Today's World* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1993), 15.

Despite the countless number of discipleship programs in today's market, their programmatic nature presents a threat to the effectiveness of discipleship. A fundamental danger in discipleship programs is that the discipleship leader may lose sight of the true aim of the program, focusing instead on promulgating his or her personal style and method of discipleship as if it were the only or the best. It may serve to help bring individuals into conformity with acceptable norms and methods, instead of bringing them into conformity with Christ as his enthusiastic and committed followers. Further, discipleship programs can serve to segregate groups between those who have completed a program versus those who have not, generating a perception that the programmed members have achieved a higher level of spiritual formation. Another danger in discipleship programs is the tendency to focus on preparing individuals to fill vacant leadership positions within the church, rather than for the purpose of directing them to search for their God-given calling. However, perhaps "the most damaging result is that churches categorize discipleship as just one of the ministries of the church, rather than the core of the ministry."²² The true intention of discipleship formation employs a holistic approach integrating the whole person with their calling, and is at the heart of what it means to be a Christ-follower.

Coaching

Coaching, "a one-on-one relationship where a coach helps you take the actions you want to reach a goal,"²³ is an effort that has gained popularity in recent years,

²² Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 36.

²³ Joseph Umidi, "What Is Coaching?" Lifeforming Leadership Coaching, accessed July 28, 2012, <http://lifeformingcoach.com/index.php#whatiscoaching>.

including individuals who train to be professional life coaches. A coaching process is generally task-oriented and short term, unlike mentoring, which is relationship-oriented and usually longer in duration. However, the skill sets used in both processes are similar.²⁴

Many churches and Christian organizations are finding value in coaching programs, including their use in discipleship efforts. In addition, Christian leadership organizations and some Christian schools now offer coaching certificate programs or degrees which train and certify individuals in the coaching process, several of them specifically with a discipleship focus.²⁵

3 Dimension Ministries, known as 3DM, is a fairly new missional organization that offers webinars and workshops and makes use of coaching huddles to train and multiply leaders in developing a discipleship culture. Mike Breen, one of 3DM's founders, describes their coaching program's driving premise: "What we need is a discipling culture, where those we disciple into covenant identity and kingdom responsibility can do the same for others. A discipling culture truly is the engine for long-term, sustainable mission."²⁶

Chad Hall, Director of Coaching at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, asserts that coaching is a viable solution for discipling others; he explains: "Too much of our discipleship efforts rely on studies and lectures that do a good job of informing but

²⁴ "Coaching and Mentoring – the Difference," Brefi Group, accessed July 28, 2012, http://www.brefigroup.co.uk/coaching/coaching_and_mentoring.html.

²⁵ A list of available coaching programs is too extensive to describe in this paper. Examples of some of the Christian programs available include: Liberty University Online, Bachelor of Science in Psychology—Life Coaching; Lifeforming Leadership; Coaching 4D Discipleship Coaching certificate program; 3DM; and CoachNet Coaching for Discipleship

²⁶ Mike Breen. "3D Coaching." 3 Dimension Ministries (3DM), accessed February 19, 2012, http://www.3dministries.com/pages/page.asp?page_id=63540.

not always such a good job of forming. This is because formation is personal.”²⁷

Coaching for discipleship uses an individualized approach, determined by the client’s personal goals and spiritual formation objectives. This personalized approach is limited by the individual’s goals and does not necessarily lend itself to leadership development, let alone journeying into a lifestyle of disciple-making if this is not a desired outcome from the coaching experience.

Coaching, whether from a personal or team approach, is intended to motivate individuals and facilitate positive change in their life. Whereas many discipleship programs utilize established curricula, the coaching process provides various tools to enable it. Tools used in the coaching process are designed to teach specific skills and competencies to help clients move beyond life’s hurdles to discover their inner calling, or to gain personal clarity regarding their purpose or ministry role in life. Coaching generally provides resources and processes intended to help the individual focus on goals and overcome obstacles that hinder a productive life.

In a coaching setting, the coach and client mutually design the coaching experience to address the particular issues, concerns, and desires the client wishes to pursue. Christian coaching evaluates the client’s personal goals, values, and spiritual gift mix to assist the client on a self-discovery journey in discerning God’s purpose and design for their life, and helps the client map out a path to achieve this purpose. In this setting, the client may have a more vested interest in the process since it is customized to their personal interests. The success of this type of relationship largely depends on how

²⁷ Chad Hall, “The Impact of Coaching for Ministry: Pastoral Care, Evangelism,” Transformed (blog), Western Seminary, December 20, 2011, accessed May 8, 2012, <http://www.westernseminary.edu/transformedblog/2011/12/20/the-impact-of-coaching-for-ministry-pastoral-care-evangelism-discipleship/>.

well the coach develops a discipling mindset in the one being coached. In order to continue the formation cycle of future disciples, the disciple needs to assimilate how to replicate this discipling relationship into another life.

The inherent danger of coaching as it pertains to the Gospel mandate is that it has the potential to ignore areas of the client's life that are not addressed in the coaching process. Additionally, the coaching process often focuses on tasks that help strengthen an individual in specific life areas. This task-based approach may result in improved ministry performance, such as developing leadership skills, acquiring the ability to speak publically, or teach a class. There is nothing wrong with improving or expanding skills so long as it is focused in the right direction and does not strengthen the individual's personal ego at the expense of spiritual formation. The coaching process should assist the disciple in realizing that in ourselves there is no good thing (Rom 7:18), and to accomplish anything of eternal value we must rely on Christ alone (Phil 4:13). The goal of coaching, to develop a deeper walk with Christ, should always be kept forefront throughout the coaching experience.

Mentoring

Discipleship mentoring is similar to coaching, but where coaching focuses mainly on tasks or specific goals, mentoring is more relational and primarily focuses on personal development concerns, such as building character, overcoming obstacles, and developing one's inner self. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines "mentor" as an experienced and trusted adviser; or, an experienced person in a company, college, or school who trains and counsels new employees or students. A mentor's role is one of a guide who models the way, and thus the mentee becomes their protégée. In the Christian

setting, discipleship mentoring is a “relationship in which one growing believer encourages and equips another to reach his or her potential as a disciple.”²⁸ The Christian mentor’s knowledge and experience, combined with role-modeling, are key elements in guiding the discipleship process.

Although mentoring may be implemented as part of a discipleship program, the most effective means is an informal setting with the mentor sharing personal spiritual struggles and victories and showing the mentee how to live a deeper Christian walk, based on where the mentee is in his or her personal walk.

While both coaching and mentoring can be effective in the discipleship process, neither in and of themselves are Christian discipleship—an intentional internship to incarnate the Word made flesh in order to promulgate the Gospel message and fulfill the Great Commission.

Missionary Movement

Beginning with the New Testament example of Paul, the call to make disciples of all nations has been taken seriously by those who have committed their lives to international cross-cultural efforts. In the early 1900s, mission organizations began to flourish, thus making a formalized effort to grow, train, send, and support missionaries in foreign countries. The missionary movement was highly successful on many fronts, and exists yet today, although not with the same intensity. As the missionary movement grew, missionaries and missionary organizations have made an effort to transfer the educational

²⁸ “Chuck Lawless, “Mentor: How Along-the-way Discipleship Will Change Your Life,” LifeWay, accessed February 5, 2013, <http://www.lifeway.com/Mentor-How-Along-the-Way-Discipleship-Will-Change-Your-Life/c/N-1z10g2i>.

and discipling roles to nationals who can more effectively minister within their own culture. In 2001, missionaries were invited to mainland China to teach ministers. Wenzao Han, the chairman of China Christian Council, explained, “We need more experienced and qualified professors to teach our students. ... In the old days, the church in China was governed by the Western church’s missionary boards ... [now] the church in China is governed by Chinese Christians.”²⁹ It is interesting to note that in recent years, foreigners have felt called to be missionaries to the United States.

Higher Education

The goal of the first denominational schools of higher education used to be to train up men and women to be Christian leaders, thereby perpetuating the intent and purpose of Christian ministry.³⁰ As churches became mainline, the schools changed accordingly, becoming the Ivy League and prestigious colleges of today, such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. The torch was then picked up by countless smaller denominations and independent groups who planted small Bible colleges across the nation. Despite the quality of academia these colleges have achieved, “a growing body of evidence points to a serious crisis in the way that Christian leaders are looking at the traditional methodologies supposedly training our people.”³¹ This is generating a current, growing trend in which churches are establishing their own schools, institutes, or even colleges. C. Peter Wagner differentiates between the premise for the old model of

²⁹ Collette M. Jenkins, “Western Missionaries Invited to China.” *Akron Beacon Journal (OH) (n.d.): Newspaper Source*, accessed November 6, 2013, *EBSCOhost*.

³⁰ Clarence Dannelly, “Denominational Colleges,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 2, no. 4 (1931): 183-89, accessed November 6, 2013, www.jstor.org.

³¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church: How God is Leading His Church into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2004), 121.

theological training and the growing awareness regarding the type of training critical to today's developing leaders:

The old wineskin presumed that if we have the right curriculum, the right faculty and the right scholarly environment, we will succeed in educating the highest-quality clergy. On the other hand, the new wineskin recognizes the fact that no one institution or no one educational style could possibly suffice. Any number of creative training programs would need to be tailor-made to fit diverse ministry challenges.³²

Educational institutions and religious organizations have begun to recognize and respond to the need for customized learning programs. Many educational programs are created to cater to working professionals by providing distance learning, which also lowers the overall associated costs providing a financial benefit as well. The author of this paper entered the George Fox doctoral program for this reason, as well as for the ability to customize the learning experience to fit personal goals and interests. These programs are reflective of the *Mass Customizing Learning* concept, a model adopted from the marketing theory of mass customization to meet diverse consumer demand. With the growing popularity of customization opportunities via the internet, marketers realized the ability to provide large quantities of customized products would add value to their products. A popular example of this type of marketing is Starbucks.³³ The jury is still out on many of these programs; however, constant evaluation and reinvention is likely to result in more creative training programs which can be translated to the Church in meaningful ways.

³² Ibid., 130.

³³ Charlotte Williams, "Mass Customized Learning: An Interview with Education Authors Charles Schwahn and Bea," Learning First Alliance, May 5, 2011, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.learningfirst.org/mass-customized-learning-interview-education-authors-charles-schwahn-and-bea-mcgarvey>.

One of the important conversations occurring today is a discussion about the future of the traditional seminaries. This discussion signifies that many recognize the old modes of higher-level education are in need of innovative and inspired change in order to survive. Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota reports loss of denominational support and rising cost of educational debt for students as contributors to their decline in enrollment. Luther Seminary is not alone, and this issue has affected some seminaries to the point of closure. In addition to economic concerns for potential seminarians, a bigger issue is the decline in interest, “as Americans as a whole become less religious—almost one-fifth of adults now have no religious affiliation—seminaries face an uncertain future.”³⁴ This emphasizes the critical need for creative training programs. Anthony Ruger, interim co-director of the Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Theological Seminary, proposes that seminaries take a good look at their purpose and identity: “Sooner or later you do have to ask: What is our mission? What are we trying to do and how can we best accomplish it? There are very deep questions about what our identity is, who we are, what we do.”³⁵ Seminaries and other educational institutions must see this time as an invitation to enter the murky stream of change in order to investigate the depths and flows and determine the new direction the stream is going. It is “the invitation of something not yet explored [that] can call forth our most creative, inquisitive, desirous nature.”³⁶

³⁴ Libby Nelson, “The Struggling Seminaries,” *Inside Higher Ed*, May 29, 2013, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/03/29/luther-seminary-makes-deep-cuts-faculty-and-staff-amid-tough-times-theological>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ray and Anderson, *Cultural Creatives*, 242.

Summary

As the prophet Isaiah explained to the Israelites about what the Lord said after their deliverance from Egypt, “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland” (Is 43:19). God does not bring his people through a storm to abandon them; he calms the storm and leads them to shore (Mk 4:35-41). From the time Christ mandated the Great Commission, the Church’s vocation has been to make disciples of Jesus; however, many efforts in this direction have not achieved the desired results. Although programs and educational curricula have their place and value, when all the elements of discipleship are placed into a program environment it often ceases to make disciples. The present Tesarac the Western Church is experiencing has once again brought this issue to the forefront. Evidence of this is seen both within the Church by the growth of programmatic solutions as well as outside the Church in a seemingly global recognition of the need for wisdom people, such as elders or sages.

Current evidence suggests a growing diversity of new forms of spirituality as well as creative reinventions of the great traditions. ... Nowadays, spirituality is not the preserve of spiritual elites, for example in monasteries, but it presumed to be native to everyone. It is individually tailored, democratic and eclectic, and offers an alternative source of inner-directed, personal authority in response to a decline of trust in conventional social and religious leaderships.³⁷

An increasing number of Americans say they are either not affiliated with religion or consider themselves to be *spiritual but not religious* (SBNR). Of those who claim Protestant affiliation, 39 percent maintain they fall into the spiritual but not religious

³⁷ Philip Sheldrake, “Is Spirituality a Passing Trend?,” OUPblog, Oxford University Press, November 23, 2012, accessed October 10, 2013, <http://blog.oup.com/2012/11/is-spirituality-a-passing-trend/>. Note: Philip Sheldrake is the visiting Professor in the Department of Theology at Boston College. Sheldrake co-founded and directed the Institute of Spirituality at Heythrop College, University of London.

category.³⁸ Those who associate themselves with the spiritual but not religious movement, commonly referred to as SBNR,³⁹ “recognize the need for guidance, but they get it from multiple sources [and] ... are heavily oriented to Eastern ideas and practices.”⁴⁰ This growing trend explains the upsurge of interest in Americans seeking spiritual guidance from alternate sources such as self-realization, shamans, gurus, wisdom teachers, Wisdom Circles or Sage-ing institutions, yoga masters, and the like. All of these include elements of spirituality, but not all recognize the one true God.

Individuals who associate themselves with SBNR develop their own blended version of spirituality, which many refer to as *interspirituality*. Interspirituality was coined by Brother Wayne Teasdale, a lay Catholic monk ordained as a Christian *Sannyassi* (a monk in the Hindu tradition). Brother Teasdale defines interspirituality as the “sharing of ultimate experiences across traditions” and claims it is the religion of the third millennium.⁴¹ If one claims to be spiritual but not religious on the premise that “to be religious is to bow to the authority of another, to believe in doctrines determined for one in advance, to read ancient texts only as they are handed down through existing

³⁸ “‘Nones’ On the Rise: One-in-five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation,” The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise-religion.aspx#profile>.

³⁹ The newly organized SBNR website, www.sbnr.org, states they are an “open source spirituality” home for “the global population of individuals who walk a spiritual path outside traditional religion.”

⁴⁰ Philip Goldberg, “Spiritual but Not Religious: Misunderstood and Here to Stay,” Huffington Post The Blog, February 13, 2013, accessed May 14, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/philip-goldberg/spiritual-but-not-religious-misunderstood-and-here-to-stay_b_2617306.html.

⁴¹ Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2001), 26.

interpretative traditions, and blindly to perform formalized rituals,”⁴² then the separation is appropriate. However, the Bible warns against false prophets and teachers (2 Pt 2:1) and the Christian Church must be alert and ready. “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living Son. . . . There is trust in God, but no following of Christ.”⁴³ This is why it is so critical that leaders rise up to assume the role of an Elder-at-the-Fire and apprentice disciples.

In this chapter, the author identified and analyzed existing and emerging trends in discipleship and discussed their strengths and weaknesses in addressing the challenge to develop an ethos of discipleship apprenticeship. The author further explained the importance of discipleship: Christian discipleship is a calling, a lifestyle, a relationship, and a journey—discipleship is being the *Word made flesh and dwelling among* the people (Jn 1:14). Discipleship invests in lives and adds to their spiritual bank account so that others can go out, as Jesus commanded, and make disciples (Mt 28). Jesus’ exhortation does not stop there; he further instructs his disciples to teach them “to observe all things that I have commanded you.” Teaching to “observe” is not, nor can it be, a program. Obeying must come from a place of readiness, a position of watchfulness, an attitude of attentiveness, and a discipline of discernment built into a relationship. The current praxes explored in this section had elements with potential to build a disciple-making ethos that replicates disciples; however, none adequately addressed the essential, that of a

⁴² Amy Hollywood, “Spiritual but Not Religious: The Vital Interplay between Submission and Freedom,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 38, no. 1 & 2 (Winter/Spring 2010): 1, accessed May 14, 2013, <http://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/winterspring2010/spiritual-not-religious>.

⁴³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: MacMillan, 1963), 64.

master to lead the way, an elder who patterns his disciple-making leadership after Christ's example.

Discipling as Jesus did cannot be done without first answering the call to be his disciple, meaning, "adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the laws of Christ which is the law of the cross."⁴⁴ Secondly, discipleship is most effective when it occurs under the apprenticeship of an elder, someone who not only teaches and models the way, but who also journeys with the disciple as a guide with the intention of replicating the Elder-at-the-Fire role.

In the next section, the author introduces the metaphor of Elder-at-the-Fire as a way to distinguish the special role of Elder as an authentic agent of Missional Generativity. The examples of Elijah's relationship with Elisha and Jesus' relationship with his disciples will be examined to explain the Elder's role and describe the pathway to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. As with Elijah and Jesus, the disciplee is invited join the Elder-at-the-Fire on a journey, thereby establishing a master-apprentice relationship essential to creating and sustaining a discipleship ethos. Embarking on a pilgrimage to Missional Generativity is critical for the true disciple of Jesus, who, in becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire, in turn transfers the mantle of discipleship to new Elders. When this transpires "there will be a missional wave the likes of which we have never seen."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁵ Mike Breen and Steve Cockram. *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did*, 2d ed. (Pawleys Island, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2011), 12.

SECTION III: THESIS

Introduction

The global shifts of the Tesarac call for a new type of Christian leader—Elder-at-the-Fire—who is able to apprentice others to a life of Missional Generativity. In ancient biblical times and in many indigenous tribal communities, the role of elder was a revered role of one who was recognized and sought out as a person of great wisdom. The Elder-at-the-Fire, like the sages of old, imparts spiritual wisdom while apprenticing others to a life of Missional Generativity. This relational role is necessary to help meet Christ’s imperative to help make disciples, or literally make learners (Gk. *manthano*), of all nations (Mt 28:19).

The previous section identified and examined current praxes for making disciples, including an examination of various discipleship resources and programs. These have played an effective and fundamental role in the health of the Church for many years, but their effectiveness in our shifting culture is waning. Barna Group, a “visionary research and resource company ... widely considered to be a leading research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture,”¹ claims that “spiritual immaturity is one of the most serious problems facing the Church.”² Further, a Barna 2014 study indicates that 38 percent of Americans now qualify as post-Christian; however, for those born between 1984 and 2002 the percentage is 48 percent, almost one-

¹ “About Barna Group,” Barna Group, accessed May 23, 2013, <http://www.barna.org/about>.

² “Barna Studies the Research, Offers a Year-in-Review Perspective,” Barna Group, December 18, 2009, accessed July 19, 2010, <https://www.barna.org/component/content/article/36-promos/homepage-main-promo/326-barna-studies-the-research-offers-a-year-in-review-perspective#.VkGXgrerQrg>.

half of all Americans.³ Perhaps this is because Church leadership too often has responded to the call to make disciples with programs and models patterned after the business world rather than Christ's relationally focused blueprint. Business used to view organizational problems as systemic; the Church has followed suit. The latest leadership research shows a trend to view organizations as open systems that, given enough input data, can change rapidly to address the pending issues.⁴ No doubt this has infiltrated the Church as well. The problem this generates is that success of the program then becomes the goal. When discipleship becomes a goal rather than a relationship, it is stilted. The failure of the Church, however, is not within the Church organization, or the Church body—individual Christians in the “ecclesia”—the failure is in a lack of leadership. A new type of leader is needed. That new type of leader may be called an Elder-at-the-Fire.

Elders-at-the-Fire are essential as critical catalysts to help the Church further the kingdom of God through this time of rapid cultural shifts and spreading globalism. The ancients, as well as primitive cultures today, relied on elders to lead them—men and women of character honed through deep life experiences, who knew their history and culture, who were aware of life's pitfalls, as well as having a clear vision of what the future could be. This wealth of accumulated experience and knowledge endowed elders with invaluable life-wisdom. Those elders frequently found their places around the flickering campfires of a thousand nights, and there, in the intimate setting of dying days,

³ “Year-in-review: Barna's Top 10 Findings from 2014,” Barna Group, December 30, 2014, accessed August 10, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/701-year-in-review-barna-s-top-10-findings-from-2014#.VkGXdrerQrg>. Note: Findings were measured by 15 different variables related to people's identity, beliefs, and behaviors.

⁴ Kathryn Armson, “Leadership Styles and Systems,” Insights + Strategies (blog), LinchpinSEO, n.d., accessed August 25, 2012, <http://www.linchpinseo.com/leadership-types-styles-and-systems>; B Alan Echtenkamp, “A Social-Cognitive Model of Leadership: Open Systems Theory at the Individual Level of Analysis,” *Leadership Review* 4 (Summer 2004): 89-102, accessed August 25, 2012, http://www.leadershipreview.org/2004fall/article2_fall_2004.asp.

transferred their life-wisdom through stories to the younger generations. Terry Jones, former mental health consultant and founder of the Elderhood Institute, states that “once elders were ... the source of blessing and taught young people about the mystery of our oneness with the universe. They fostered an oral tradition and offered wisdom to younger folks. What happened?”⁵ Where are the Christian elders who are able to impart life-wisdom and instill within disciples a deep and necessary identification with Christ and concern for developing the next generations?

An Elder-at-the-Fire is not to replace the church Elder, nor is it a formal position within an organized Church structure (i.e., pastor, teacher, board member, staff member, bible study leader, etc.; 1 Cor 12:27). An Elder-at-the-Fire can certainly be a pastor or teacher, but can just as easily be a layperson in the congregation. Elders-at-the-Fire are agents of Missional Generativity and have the unique ability to be the necessary catalyst to help others become generative disciples of Christ, through any kind of cultural or societal change, such as a Tesarac. This is accomplished by guiding the disciple into identification with Christ, helping align his or her life with timeless principles, and assisting the disciple to recognize and fulfill the purpose for which he or she was born. The Elder-at-the-Fire who practices Missional Generativity creates a foundation for extending a discipleship culture into the future.

The next segments of this chapter will examine various aspects related to being an Elder-at-the-Fire. The first segment will describe the theory of generativity, the crisis of self-absorption versus generativity, the importance of meaning making in generativity, and four types of generativity. The second segment sets forth a new type of generativity

⁵ Terry Jones, *Elder: A Spiritual Alternative to Being Elderly* (Portland, OR: Elderhood Institute Books, 2006), i.

identified by the author as *Missional Generativity*. Both missional and generativity must be clearly understood in order to understand the uniqueness of joining the two. In this segment, the author will illustrate how the powerful life-moving force essential to discipleship occurs when ‘missional’ and ‘generative’ characterize relationships and are applied to narrative. The foundation laid in these first two segments is essential for understanding the purpose and meaning of the Elder-at-the-Fire metaphor. Simply put, the main qualification of being an Elder-at-the-Fire is to live a life characterized by Missional Generativity, from which they apprentice others to assume the role of Elder-at-the-Fire. The next segment explains the importance of fire in the Elder-at-the-Fire metaphor and its centrality to Missional Generativity, delineates the Elder’s role and characteristics, and describes the pathway to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. The second-to-last segment uses Elijah’s journey and the life of Jesus as biblical examples of Elders-at-the-Fire. The final segment challenges readers to become an Elder-at-the-Fire.

Generativity

Psychologist and sociologist Dr. Erik Erickson introduced the term *generativity* as the seventh stage in his theory on the psychosocial developmental stages in life. In its simplest form, generativity can be defined as a yearning with “establishing and guiding the next generation.”⁶ Author and professor John Kotre defines generativity as a legacy by which a person invests one’s self “in forms of life and work that outlive the self.”⁷

⁶ Erik Erickson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 267.

⁷ John Kotre, *Outliving the Self: Generativity and the Interpretation of Lives* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 10.

The Latin root from which “generativity” is derived is *genus*, or *generic*, meaning *to give birth*, or, *of the same kind*.⁸ The very nature of this word suggests procreation, reproduction, caring, creativity, sustaining, and energy. This active force spreads like yeast to encompass other generations with a regenerative power that transforms, altering the gene pool of its community and contributing to fertility and growth. Biologist Rupert Sheldrake explains that the generative field of a living system extends into its environment and connects the two.⁹ Generativity always involves some kind of birthing—creating new life.

Erickson explains generativity as a virtue achieved when an individual has successfully mastered the earlier development stages. Erickson’s theory of eight epigenetic developmental stages (Table 1) are characterized by conflicts or crises which must be successfully navigated in order to produce valuable virtues that enable further development at the next life stage. Unsuccessful management of these developmental stages creates *maladaptations* or *malignancies*, which in turn imperil healthy development in upcoming life stages. In the event the developmental stage of generativity is not successfully achieved, the outcome is a life marked by self-absorption and/or stagnation, creating feelings of overextension or reactivity, ultimately resulting in despair.¹⁰

⁸ Derivatives of these roots include *generate* - to produce; to cause to be. Also: *generation*, *regenerate* (to cause to be completely renewed; to give a new spiritual life to; to bring into existence again), *regeneration*, *regenerative*. [*genero*, *generare*, *generavi*, *generatus* - to beget; to produce]. *generative* - 1) having to do with production; 2) capable of producing.

⁹ Peter Senge et al., *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* (Cambridge, MA: SoL, 2004), 4.

¹⁰ Dr. C. George Boeree, “Personality Theories: Erik Erikson.” 2006, accessed November 22, 2004, <http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/erikson.html>.

Table 1. Erik Erickson's Stage Theory¹¹

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Age	Psychosocial Virtues	Maladaptations and Malignancies
1	Trust vs. Mistrust	0-1 Infancy	Hope	Sensory Distortion Withdrawal
2	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	2-3 Toddler	Willpower, Determination	Impulsivity Compulsion
3	Initiative vs. Guilt	3-6 Preschooler	Purpose	Ruthlessness Inhibition
4	Industry vs. Inferiority	7-12 or so School-aged Children	Competence	Narrow Virtuosity Inertia
5	Ego-Identity vs. Role Confusion	12-18 or so Adolescence	Fidelity	Fanaticism Repudiation
6	Intimacy vs. Isolation	20s Young Adulthood	Love	Promiscuity Exclusivity
7	Generativity vs. Stagnation or Self-absorption	Late 20s-50s Middle Adulthood	Care	Overextension Rejectivity
8	Ego-Integrity vs. Despair	50+; Older Adulthood	Wisdom	Presumption Despair

Various developmental disruptions may impede development progress in the earlier stages, and the effect may cripple the individual's ability to successfully maneuver each stage. The greatest concern to the development of generativity is the psychosocial crisis of stagnation or self-absorption. When disruptions occur, a loss of identity or acquiring a false identity may occur; a healthy, adapted identity is a critical component for achieving generativity. A variety of elements can act as disruptions and create a crisis in the developmental process, such as: natural disasters or occurrences, cultural and social

¹¹ "Erik Erickson's Stage Theory," The University of Georgia College of Education, accessed November 20, 2004, <http://www.coe.uga.edu/~cmims/Erikson/pages/chart.html>. Chart adapted from a summative chart on Erik Erickson's Stage Theory of psychosocial development.

factors, natural and orchestrated catastrophes, and personal belief systems. The present Tesarac represents such a developmental disruption; cultural and societal norms are changing so rapidly that individuals and groups must constantly reorient the ways in which they work, learn, and think, especially for those who find change difficult. This provides an explanation as to the tension in which the Church finds itself. Erickson describes the effect such an occurrence can produce:

The danger of any period of large-scale uprooting and transmigration is that exterior crises will, in too many individuals and generations, upset the hierarchy of developmental crisis and their built-in correctives; and that man will lose those roots that must be planted firmly in meaningful life cycles. For man's true roots are nourished in the sequence of generations and he loses his taproots in disrupted developmental time.¹²

Self-Absorption vs. Generativity

Modern society has increasingly become self-absorbed and individualistic, promoting an ego-centric, self-centered, self-servicing, self-identity, consumer-centered mentality. This self-focus is *de-generative*. It cannot produce life. In a high-velocity changing environment, these self-absorptions become more prevalent, particularly when an individual or group of people, such as a church community, is unwilling or unable to change. Individuals unable to honestly assess systems and paradigms, who are unwilling to change their beliefs, behavior patterns, and traditions, will be suctioned further into a life that becomes stagnant and stale. Further, media and consumerism has produced a passive society in which many live out their lives in virtual spaces and are entertained by scripted reality. Rukia Draw, a Mentoring Coordinator at the faith-based *Outreach Community Ministries* in Illinois, addresses the question of the Church's role in

¹² Erik Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility: Lectures on the Ethical Implications of Psychoanalytic Insight* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), 96.

transferring faith to the next generation, and the importance of generativity in sustaining Christianity into a new generation. She claims:

Generativity will become an increasingly important term for the church because it is precisely where two of its central tasks meet: meaning making and caring for others. If Christians fail to do these two things well, they miss the very heart of their mission in the world. A church with an aborted mission cannot provide for the young the things they desire most according to psychosocial theory: security, belonging, and identity. Without the nurturing of future generations from the earliest of opportunities, Christianity will not remain a living religion and vital institution.¹³

Unfortunately, self-absorption has crept into the spiritual and relational structure of the Church, resulting in a reproductive system that has been hindered by contraceptive interactions. These contraceptive devices, or segregating factors, take many forms. Many Church communities have erected partitions that segment age-related groups (children's groups, youth groups, etc.), life circumstance groups (young moms, single parents, etc.), gender groups, and so on. These, in and of themselves, are not bad. However, in many cases, this segregation has broken the circle of community and disrupted the development of a Christ-identity crucial for the Christian disciple. In many instances, the Church is no longer a whole cohesive unit; it has become a set of fragmented and exclusive particles. The interactivity necessary for reproductive community has stagnated and produced complacency or apathy.

In addition to denominational and local Church programs, small group Bible studies, committees, Church membership, and traditional hierarchal leadership structures tend to foster environments that can become exclusive rather than inclusive. Admittance into these circles is often by invitation only, where adherence to assumed codes of

¹³ Rukia Draw, "Generativity and Regeneration in Bushnellian Theology," *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 101.

doctrine, spiritual conduct, rituals, and traditions is expected. The programs, opportunities, and doctrines within a Church can become a contributing factor in creating a sense of isolation by building silent boundaries that prevent generative relationships. These boundaries act as negative interactions, which create an environment susceptible to disease rather than a regenerating life cycle.

The Church becomes a wasteland of aimless self-absorbed pilgrims, hopeless and fruitless—its walls like the idols the Israelites worshiped, or the fear of giants in the Promised Land. Rather than being a dynamic flourishing organism flowing with God's grace to reproduce disciples and transform people, it engenders an unhealthy static organism that breeds insecurity, complacency, self-absorption, grumbling, whining, doubt, and fear, and in due course leads to discouragement and decay. Though all of these structures generate the illusion of a connected society, the connections are still-born. In an infertile environment, stagnation and self-absorption settle in, becoming a destructive force to maintaining a healthy Christian identity. Eventually, this can lead to spiritual despair and ultimately death—the maladaptations and malignancies are results of the inability to develop generativity. In effect, the Church may unknowingly become a host for spiritual disease rather than generating spiritual health. In the book *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*, the authors use an example of human cells to describe how malignancies occur:

...cells develop a kind of social identity according to their immediate context and what is needed for the health of the larger organism. When a cell's morphic field deteriorates, its awareness of the larger whole deteriorates. A cell that loses its social identity reverts to blind undifferentiated cell division, which can ultimately threaten the life of the larger organism. It is what we know as cancer.¹⁴

¹⁴ Senge, *Presence*, 4-5.

There is hope for counteracting self-absorption, complacency, and stagnation. Their destructive path can be reversed through the power of a generative work within the body. The key to health and integration is to maintain soft, flexible boundaries that allow for overlapping into the body as a whole; creating a web of concentric circles with a common center. For the Christian, that common center is Jesus Christ. Essential to this concentric circle is a cycle of continued growth and renewal, not only in the organism, but in individuals. This cycle is fostered by generativity and given meaning by the redemptive story of the cross.

Generativity and Meaning

Generativity is a complex concept that encompasses all areas of life. Erikson deemed generativity to be the fundamental component “around which all life stages are naturally and teleologically organized.”¹⁵ Without generativity, successful movement to full maturity will not occur, thereby causing stagnation and feelings of despair. John Kotre, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at University of Michigan, explains the larger concept of generativity:

Generativity is a concept that invites us to see the entire range of ways human beings leave their stamp on the future. ... [It] denotes a power that is both instinctual and psychosocial, one that engages imagination, reason, conscience, and will. Generativity covers both the “low” and “high” in humans, denigrating neither, showing in fact that the two are continuous. The word refers not only to activities as diverse as conceiving progeny and initiating social movements but also to caring for them once they are brought into existence.¹⁶

Ed de St. Aubin and Don McAdams, professors of human development and psychology, illustrate the anatomy of generativity (Figure 3). This diagram depicts how

¹⁵ McAdams, *Generativity and Adult Development*, 136.

¹⁶ Kotre, *Outliving the Self*, 7.

motivational sources, thoughts, plans, and behaviors integrate with seven attributes of generativity to instill meaning into the life of the generative individual as well as provide meaning to their generative concern (the next generation).

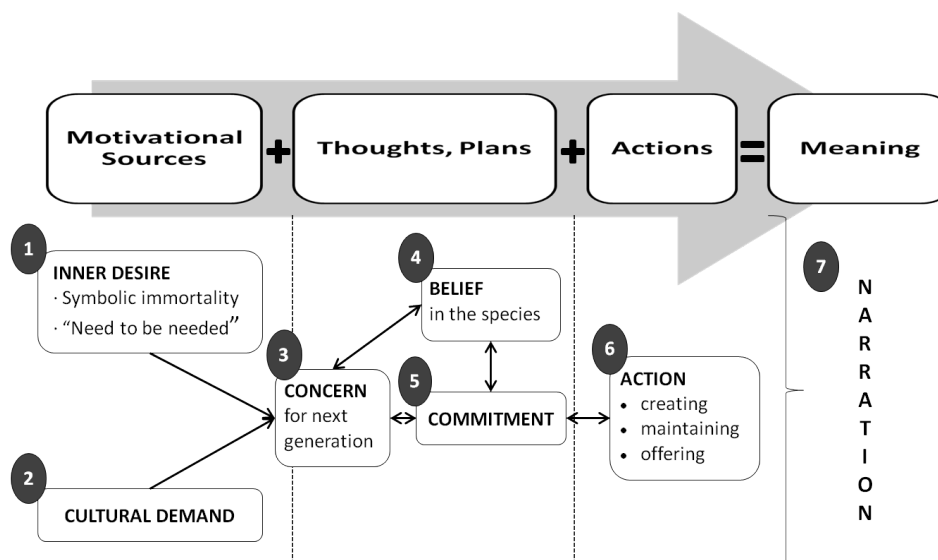


Figure 3 - Seven Features of Generativity¹⁷

The path to generativity begins when the motivational sources (1) *inner desire* and (2) *cultural demand* collide to create a (3) *concern*. Frequently, the inner desire is related to a desire to leave a legacy or, as indicated in the diagram, is generated from a need to be needed. When this inner desire responds to a cultural demand (e.g., to help end poverty), it results in a concern, often referred to as a generative concern. For the Church, this concern is the mandate to “make disciples.” In generativity, the concern always encompasses future generations, not just the present. When this concern is reinforced with an intrinsic or extrinsic (4) *belief* (thought) in something of vital importance, a (5) *generative commitment* (plan) is made to the concern and leads to a (6) *generative action* (behavior) in which an individual endeavors to add meaning. This meaning-making

¹⁷ McAdams, *Generativity and Adult Development*, 9. Chart revised and adapted from McAdams.

occurs through a (7) *narration* of generativity. “All seven features of generativity are oriented around the overall goal—a goal that (ideally) the individual and society share—of *providing for the next generation* ... for the survival, well-being, and development of human life in succeeding generations.”¹⁸ A generative action that concludes with the action itself is not generativity. Motivational sources and generative thoughts, plans, and actions must be followed by meaning-giving. “Generative acts are given meaning in (7) *narration*, and these meanings feed back to inform inner desire, cultural demand, conscious concern, belief, commitment, and later generative acts.”¹⁹ Meaning-giving is essential to the purpose of generativity, to move it forward in order for future generations to also participate in generative acts, thus continuing the cycle of generativity.

The *Seven Features of Generativity* diagram simplifies the concept of generativity to enable an understanding of the process; however, generativity is far more than steps in a process. Generativity is a drive—a fertile, creative, compelling force which thrusts an individual into something beyond him- or herself, carrying forward a historic narrative that contains experiences and lessons the generative individual learned along the way, thus feeding significance and value back into his or her life as well as into the future. Generativity always extends itself into the future, and transcends the self as well as the generative act. Generativity is not only a concern for the next generation, but all future generations typified by extending love into the future without reciprocal expectations.²⁰

John Kotre, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, further delineates generativity by dividing it into four areas or types: biological, parental,

¹⁸ Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

²⁰ Boeree, “Personality Theories.”

technical, and cultural (Table 2).²¹ Each of these types affects a generative object through which the seven attributes of generativity are brought into play.

Table 2. Types of Generativity

Type	Description
1. Biological	Begetting, bearing, and nursing offspring. Generative object: the infant
2. Parental	Nurturing and disciplining offspring, initiating them into a family's tradition. Generative object: the child
3. Technical	Teaching skills—the “body” of a culture—to successors, implicitly passing on the symbol system in which the skills are embedded. Generative objects: the apprentice, the skill
4. Cultural	Creating, renovating, and conserving a symbol system—the “mind” of a culture—explicitly passing it on to successors. Generative objects: the disciple, the culture

The premise of this paper adds a fifth element of generativity, one inclusive of the other four and adding a spiritual element intrinsic to the role of Elder-at-the-Fire, that of *Missional* Generativity.

Missional Generativity

Missional Generativity is a life-breathing, fructifying passion that, when adopted, will fulfill the Great Commission by sharing the love of Jesus Christ in a culturally relevant way to *all* generations, present and future. In essence, Missional Generativity is simply applying generative principles in a missional way.

²¹ Kotre, *Outliving the Self*, 12.

Missional Generativity was God-breathed into the world with the Genesis creation. It extends to the birth and personhood of Jesus Christ and intersects with the cross to resurrect life from death, and is sustained by the permeating power of the Holy Spirit. Missional Generativity proclaims salvation's historical, redemptive, living story and places it into the context of today's culture in order to bring healing and deliverance to all creation.

Many Christians and non-Christians alike are involved in generative acts that lead to generativity; however, these actions are often born from altruistic concerns to meet a need or provide humanitarian comfort on a one-time or limited basis. "Helping people in need out of altruistic regard for their suffering is of course admirable, but it is not generativity; a 'birth' must be involved."²² The Christian may also participate in actions that are missional in nature; however, without transmitting a Christian narrative in a relational manner, these acts fall short of generativity, let alone Missional Generativity. Unfortunately, in some cases, the missional act only serves the individual performing the act, and is often diminished to collecting experiences and pictures—trophies of a tourist. Missional Generativity goes beyond missional and generative acts; inherent in Missional Generativity is the desire to participate in life-giving, life-birthing relationships that reproduce and extend to future generations, even to those yet unborn.

According to Dr. Leonard Sweet, missional "is living a life born in the very being of God. It is the body of the church dancing to the tune of the Spirit."²³ The missional aspect of Missional Generativity differentiates it from generativity in three ways:

²² McAdams, *Generativity and Adult Development*, 173.

²³ Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church: Missional, Relational, Incarnational* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 27.

relationally (with others and God), the source of inner desire or passion (Christ's presence within), and missional action (being the hands, feet, arms, and heart of Jesus). The 'motivational source' of Missional Generativity, as previously discussed in the Seven Features of Generativity (Figure 3), stems from a personal relationship with Jesus and a concern for extending that relationship to others—to make disciples. Christ, then, is the permeating presence in the individual's 'thoughts and plans' which lead to 'actions' that are both missional and generative.

Dr. Jerome Wakefield, a professor of social work at New York University, has studied generativity extensively; he defines generativity as a *triadic relationship*. The triadic relationship involves a *generative individual*, a *generative love object*, and a *generative product*.²⁴ Generative love functions as the vehicle through which the generative product is created and nurtured. Similarly, Leonard Sweet, in his book *So Beautiful*, describes three words that “encode the secret to a disciple's life”²⁵: Missional, Relational, and Incarnational (MRI). He further relates these terms to how Jesus describes himself, The Way (missional), the Truth (relational), and the Life (incarnational). In this context, missional as the Way is the “mind” of God, the Truth (relational) is the “heart” of God, and the incarnational Life represents the “hand” of God.²⁶

Wakefield's model of generativity coalesced with Sweet's MRI model begins to expand the understanding of the spiritual element of Missional Generativity (Figure 4). In Missional Generativity, the generative individual seeks to have the missional mind of Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5), demonstrates love toward others from a heart centered in Christ

²⁴ McAdams, *Generativity and Adult Development*, 149.

²⁵ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-31.

(Jn 13:34-35), and becomes God's hands and feet in his work (Phil 4:9). By joining generative principles with MRI, the Christian then forms a sense of self that is centered in Christ's mission, resulting in Missional Generativity. This marriage produces a generative love that extends God's mission into future generations.

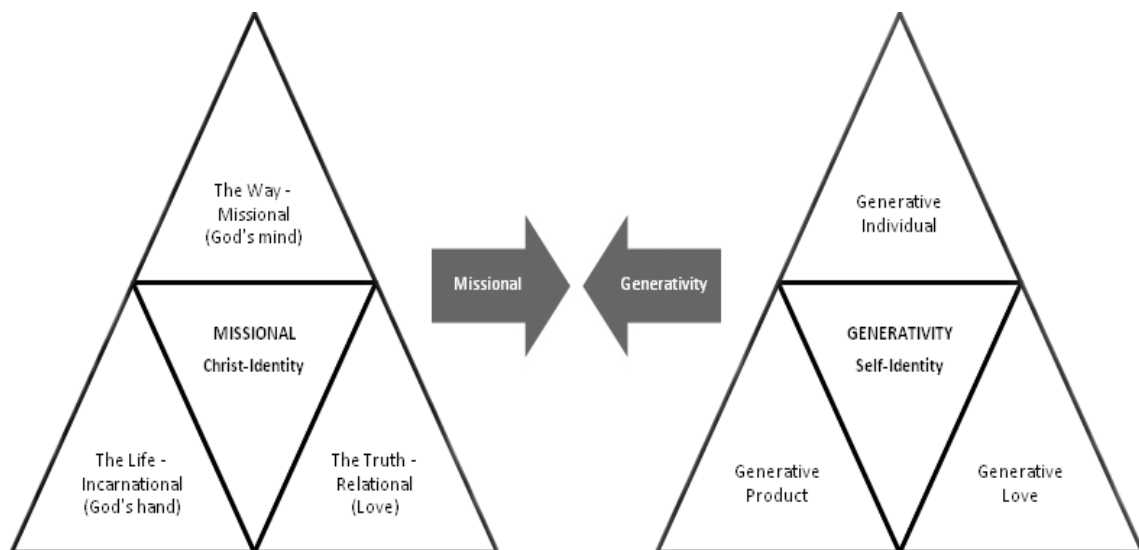


Figure 4 – Comparison: Sweet's MRI triad to Wakefield's Generativity Triad

Wakefield believed that Plato would argue that “love is not an end in itself but merely a means directed at the satisfaction of a further end, namely, immortality through generativity.”²⁷ For the Christian, this is not enough; the ultimate act of generativity occurred on the cross, becoming the doorway to Missional Generativity. Christ's resurrection and ascension opened the door! To develop Missional Generativity, the generative individual seeks to incorporate missional, relational, and incarnational elements to form a missional Christ-identity. Catholic theologian Ronald Rolheiser aptly describes the type of identity essential to Missional Generativity:

Scripture tells us that we carry within us the image and likeness of God and that this is really our deepest identity and the source of our deepest energies. But we

²⁷ McAdams, *Generativity and Adult Development*, 143.

should not picture God's image within us as some beautiful, Andrei Rublev-like, icon stamped inside our souls. God is fire, holy energy, infinite creativity, infinite freedom, wildness beyond our imaginations, and an energy that is boundless and fuels everything that is, that lives, that breathes, that searches for meaning, that loves.²⁸

As missionality and generativity merge, the generative individual seeks to center their identity in Christ (Figure 5). This Christ-identity instills the "mind of Christ" in the individual (Phil 2:5), not described by intellectual prowess, but by Christ's nature, character, and actions (Phil 2:5-11). "What is intended by 'mind' is disposition. ... 'In Christ' that disposition is that of servanthood, whatever the cost to self. For Christ it meant the refusal to 'clutch' what was rightfully his as he gave himself wholly in obedience to God, even to the extent of the cross."²⁹ Identity in Christ is essential to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire and is the reason one must embark on a pilgrimage to Missional Generativity. Identity in Christ cannot be centered in the statement, "I am a Christian." Neither is it identification with a particular church, doctrine, position, or office within the Church, or observing specific spiritual practices. Identity in Christ is only achieved by participating in and surrendering to Christ's sufferings, even to the cross (Mk 8:34-35, 10:38; Lk 9:23-24). An identity centered in Christ takes on the form or character of Christ, maturing into a part of a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). From this center, and only this center, Missional Generativity can occur. In addition, as in Erickson's theory on developmental stages, intimacy is fundamental to generativity; likewise, it is significant for a life marked by Missional Generativity. The unifying factor which holds the triad in place is one of intimacy—intimacy in knowledge of Christ,

²⁸ Ronald Rolheiser, "Feeding off Life's Sacred Fire," RonRolheiser, OMI, August 27, 2011, accessed July 20, 2012, <http://ronrolheiser.com/feeding-off-lifes-sacred-fire/#.VkKKlberQrg>.

²⁹ Frank Stagg, "The Mind in Christ Jesus: Philippians 1:27-2:18," *Review and Expositor*, 77, no. 3 (1980): 338, accessed January 11, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

relationship with Christ, and service for Christ. If any one of the segments in the triad is absent, Missional Generativity does not occur.

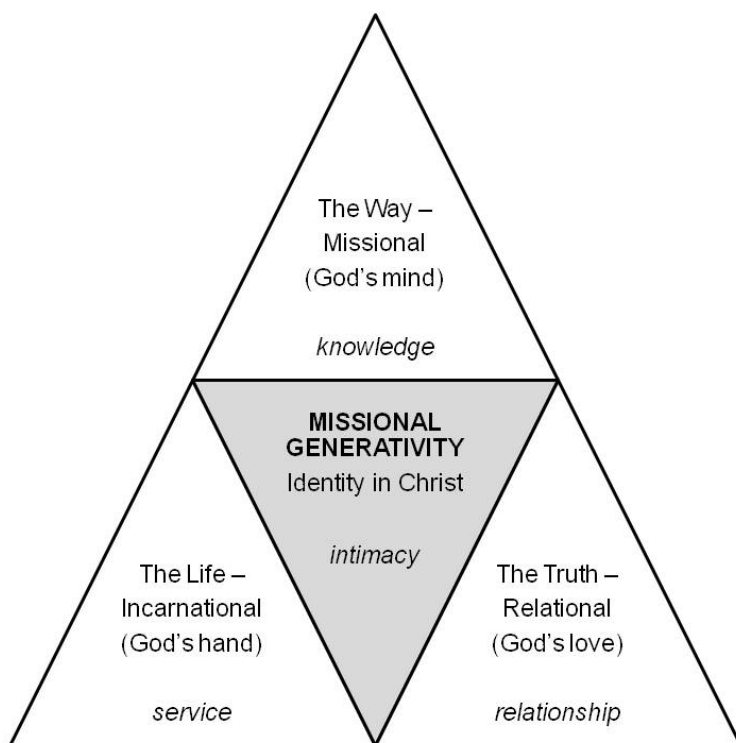


Figure 5 – Missional Generativity

Missional Generativity is served out in a selfless, intentional commitment to relationally interact with others. Centered in an identity in Christ, the Elder-at-the-Fire operates from a position of agape love, striving to develop mutuality in relationship with others while keeping in mind the purpose of Jesus to foster abundant life (Jn 10:10).

Relational Mutuality

To further understand Missional Generativity and its importance in the context of developing mature Christians, a discussion on relational mutuality is necessary. The natural flow within a healthy society is one in which there is a feeding, nurturing, caring,

learning, and growing environment that benefits the whole and provides fertile ground for reproduction. This fertility is a generative, creative power that infuses energy and vibrancy into life as well as a community exemplified by mutuality. The effectiveness of an Elder-at-the-Fire's ability to pass this role to others is largely dependent on relationships of mutuality. Relationships based on mutuality create a connection that provides healing elements and empowers others. "Human beings need each other precisely in relationships of mutuality."³⁰

Mutuality is an interaction between individuals, or an individual and a generation, which creates a hub for the life of a community. Mutuality provides a relational connection that infuses energy and vitality into individuals, both to the one who gives and the one receiving. Mutuality exists in growth. Henri Nouwen, Catholic priest and internationally renowned author, wrote in his journal: "Your own growth cannot take place without growth in others. You are part of a body. When you change, the whole body changes. It is very important for you to remain deeply connected with the larger community to which you belong."³¹

Nouwen's description of growth illustrates how mutuality can lead to restoration through relationship. An obstructed flow of generativity fractures the connection and leads to stagnation, self-absorption, and, if not interrupted, it results in death. Jesus said that a branch that does not remain connected to the vine is cut off whereas a branch that remains in the vine bears much fruit; those who bear much fruit show themselves to be his disciples (Jn 15:1-8). The metaphor of a branch abiding in a vine provides a picture of

³⁰ Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Journey to Wholeness* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), 83.

³¹ Henri J M. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 57.

mutuality in relationship. This mutuality of giving and receiving enhances and strengthens the growth cycle for both entities. If the relationship or connectedness is broken, the growth cycle deteriorates. In Missional Generativity, the source of mutuality flows from abiding in Jesus Christ. For the Church, maintaining connections through webs of relationships, both upward and outward, is vital for developing mature disciples.

Because of its very nature, mutuality as a part of Missional Generativity must extend beyond the confines of the Church body and be transported through a narrative that connects the intersecting past and future with the present. Further, inherent to Missional Generativity is a commitment to meaningful action that leads back to the narrative of Jesus. As discussed previously, generative acts are given meaning in narration. This narrative helps foster relational mutuality while helping to contextualize the Christ-story and bring purpose and meaning to life. A narrative that emphasizes the purpose and meaning for Christ's commission is vital for true Missional Generativity.

Missiogenepic Narrative

The Church needs a narrative of epic significance, a narrative that renews and stirs the hearts of men and women and causes them to rise up to become meaningful agents of the story. The narrative that brings significance to Missional Generativity is the *missiogenepic*³² story. The term “missiogenepic” combines *missio dei* (the mission of God) and *genus* (birth, race, produce—root of generativity), with the Latin and Greek roots *epicus* and *epikos* (word, story, poem—a long composition written in a heroic or grand manner, with a central theme). Missiogenepic brings together God's mission in its

³² *Missiogenepic* is a term coined by the author.

totality, encompassing all creation and peoples regardless of race or gender throughout all generations, woven into a poetic, heroic, majestic narrative. The missiogenepic story is the overarching story of Missional Generativity. It is an epic story in which its centrality is Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of his mission through the cross.

Like all great epics, the missiogenepic story is a multifaceted, multi-layered story that spans generations and nations and is filled with adventure, mystery, poetry, intrigue, prophecies, love, war, heroes and villains; and central to the story is an epic battle for control of a kingdom. Unlike most epic stories, the outcome of the battle in the missiogenepic narrative was pre-conquered on the cross through Christ's atoning sacrifice when Jesus "gave himself as a ransom for all people" (1 Tim 2:6). Christ paid the ultimate price, voluntarily donating his life blood in payment for the world's sin, thereby securing salvation for all who will accept the gift of redemption (Eph 1:7-8a). Missional Generativity proclaims salvation's historical, redemptive, living story and places it into the context of today's culture in order to bring healing and deliverance to all creation.

The missiogenepic story was written forward before the world was created. It is characterized by a redemptive, transformative message, with the power to generatively recreate individuals and societies; a story has the ability to incarnate itself within us. This Christocentric story instills meaning in Missional Generativity; it seeks to make itself flesh to the world by striving to integrate the story's meaning into the life of its culture. This story compels a witness that bears light to the world (Mt 5:14-16), so that the world can hear and understand the one true message that provides meaning and significance to lives—the redemption story, the missiogenepic narrative.

To fully comprehend the importance of the redemptive element in the missiogenepic narrative, it is imperative to understand the ransom requirement. Initially, when God created Adam and Eve, there was no separation from sin; they enjoyed full communion with God and fully belonged to Him. This relationship was broken in a single act of disobedience by eating the forbidden fruit, thereby separating themselves from God and bringing sin and its consequence not only upon themselves, but as an inheritance to all generations (Gn 2-3; Rom 5:19). In order to redeem or buy back mankind's freedom from sin's ownership, a ransom payment would be required. This redemptive force was created through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, purchasing new life for all believers.

Narrative is an essential ingredient in interweaving mankind's lives. From the beginning of the world, narrative has directed, organized, and created meaning and coherence and helped establish individual, corporate, and social identities. Without narrative we would know little or nothing of the origins of creation or our place in history. The ability to place oneself within a historical and present context is an important ingredient in sense-making, a means of interpreting our lives in order to recreate and transform our stories into something meaningful and generative. In the missiogenepic narrative, sense-making comes through identifying oneself with Christ and the cross.

When one inhabits the missiogenepic narrative and makes it their dwelling place, the result is the Word—*Jesus*—incarnated within (Jn 15:1-8). The missiogenepic story then becomes the overarching story that encompasses the Christian's life and is the fructifying element that deepens the meaning of Missional Generativity. The missiogenepic story thus influences three interrelated aspects of an individual, and

correlates directly to Missional Generativity: (1) it defines reality—God’s mind and way become the mind and way of the believer; (2) it forms character—the believer’s character develops into a Christ-like character; and (3) it guides actions—the Word made flesh, being Jesus to the world.³³ These three characteristics relate directly to Sweet’s MRI model and are “the design by which humans and their communities best construct narrative identities and senses of self.”³⁴ Figure 6 illustrates how these three aspects become a nexus between the missiogenepic narrative and Missional Generativity.



Figure 6 – Missiogenepic Narrative

Old tribal communities, such as Native American tribes, offer an example of how narrative worked within the tribal community to help establish a sense of place and

³³ John Stumme, “Inhabiting the Christian Narrative: An Example of the Relationship between Religion and the Moral Life,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 3, no. 1 (January 2003): 1, accessed July 20, 2012, http://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/896?_ga=1.98153759.1899096800.1447202659.

³⁴ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 29.

context important to the tribe's identity. Bing Dictionary describes a tribe as a "social division of people: a society or division of a society whose members have ancestry, customs, beliefs, and leadership in common." There are many elements that worked together to maintain the flow of life and work within the tribal environment. The tribal community illustrates how the interconnectedness of all generations fosters and maintains a vibrant community; individual members of a tribe are part of a whole that includes, among other things, all tribal members, their ancestors, future generations, and nature. Care and nurturing of young ones, encouraging youth in pursuit of dreams and identity, rites of initiation, and becoming a tribal elder for the purpose of passing on traditions and wisdom were important elements in maintaining life in the tribal community. Narrative played a large role in weaving these elements together to create meaning and promote a strong sense of identity and purpose. The telling of stories was an important role of a tribal elder, not only for bringing the tribe together as a community, but also for passing on tribal history and identity in order to keep their customs and traditions alive. Chief Cecile Hansen of the Duwamish Indian Tribe³⁵ describes the elder's role in transmitting identity to future generations. "Our people want to know about their own culture, but it cannot be handed to them on a piece of paper, or linked to a website. Our Indian identity is in our soul, and it must be conveyed from soul to soul. It is a way of living—a way of experiencing life. It is not 'book knowledge.'"³⁶

³⁵ "Duwamish Tribe," accessed August 28, 2009, <http://www.duwamishtribe.org>. Note: The Duwamish Tribe claims to be the first inhabitants of the greater Seattle, WA area, named after Chief Si'ahl' (Seattle). Chief Cecile Hansen is the great, great granddaughter of Chief Seattle.

³⁶ Elizabeth Lévesque, *Wisdom of the Chiefs: The Wisdom and Words of 52 Native American Chiefs with Scriptural Devotions* (Scotland, PA: Healing the Land, 2004), 35.

The Church as an organism is similar, but distinctly different because its identity exists in Christ and the cross, not in traditions or customs; it must pass the Christ-identity story from soul to soul. Just as Native American tribal communities lost their identity due to volatile change, the Church and its people have been struggling to retain their identity in the midst of the Tesarac's societal upheaval. In many, if not most, cases, the Church has lost its sense of identity and has become an egoistic society—self-preoccupied—neutered and unproductive in developing mature Christians.

The Church is presented with a new set of challenges and opportunities for presenting the Gospel narrative. Jack Whelan, Communications professor at the University of Washington, writes in his blog, *After the Future*, that the narratives of the Church are no longer robust enough to play much of a role in Christianity. He states that they

... have come to represent the calcified remains of narratives that did at one time have genuine vitality. The first was the Christian narrative of the premodern era; the second of the modern era. Now we need a Christian narrative that draws life from those underground sources that are true to the mystery and yet relevant for the new era dawning.³⁷

To reverse this degenerative cycle and nurture people to thrive in a culture of high velocity change, the missiogenepic story of Missional Generativity is imperative. Like Chief Hansen of the Duwamish Tribe, an Elder-at-the-Fire passes on the missiogenepic Christ-story from soul to soul. This story is central to Missional Generativity. The importance of story, or narrative, for the Church is explained by Church Consultant Mark Miller:

³⁷ Jack Whelan, "Does Christianity Have a Future?," *After the Future* (blog), December 27, 2005, accessed July 20, 2012, http://afterthefuture.typepad.com/afterthefuture/2005/12/does_chrtianit.html.

While there are many reasons why the Church in America is in decline, the most striking reason is that people are no longer connecting with the redemptive story of the Bible. We live in a culture that is craving narratives, metaphors, and images—anything that can provide some meaning to their nihilistic lives. The Church has the greatest story ever told. The story, Scripture tells us, is the power of God to transform lives.³⁸

To further develop Christians, the Church must embrace new methodologies of communicating and synthesizing the missiogenepic narrative in ways that allow individuals to decipher and integrate its meaning personally, rather than corporately, and which leads to a deeper level of maturity. The Elder-at-the-Fire seeks to inhabit the missiogenepic narrative and to live out the story as Jesus, the Word made flesh. Reverend John Stumme, Associate Director for Studies in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, describes what it means to dwell in a narrative:

To inhabit the narrative means to live it from the inside; it is to know its language, its images, its individual stories, its practices, its people; it is to be at home in the familiar surroundings that it creates. To inhabit the narrative is to trust in the God whose story it tells, to make the narrative one's own, to view the world and self in its terms and to respond to its calling to a new way of life.³⁹

For the most part, modern Christianity has presented narrative in a linear, hierarchical fashion. This hierarchical format resulted in “many modern people [who] found religion more interested in closing boundaries than in opening them, more concerned with sanctions than with release, more an attempt to occupy space than to find it.”⁴⁰ The Church, in many instances, has created definitions and boundaries by which the individual should experience and live out his or her spirituality. When realities are

³⁸ Mark Miller, *Experiential Storytelling: (Re)discovering Narrative to Communicate God's Message* (El Cajon, CA: Zondervan, 2003), 5-6.

³⁹ Stumme.

⁴⁰ Kurtz, *Spirituality of Imperfection*, 24.

defined by others it can create disturbances that in turn restrict the development of a mature spiritual identity.

Without a sense of place or identity, there is a void or ache that permeates the life of individuals. Rolheiser, in *The Holy Longing*, describes this ache as a *dis-ease*, an uneasiness at the center of our being.⁴¹ The great seventeenth century French mathematician Blaise Pascal is credited as the originator of the often-quoted phrase to describe this need for sense making: “within each man is a God-shaped vacuum.” When this vacuum is not filled, it becomes a gnawing ache that pursues alternate modes to fill or ignore the vacuum, generating self-absorption or stagnation.

One of the most important core values and key factors for any Elder-at-the-Fire to be successful in cultivating and spreading Missional Generativity is to first develop a solid identity centered in the person of Jesus Christ. The individual must aspire to intimate communion with Jesus, recognizing and nurturing their heart’s Christ-implemented, Holy-Spirit-inspired passion. This inner drive is the divine call to Missional Generativity by which others are drawn into the missiogenepic story. The missiogenepic narrative serves as a threshold; its fluid, permeable, and absorptive nature provides a liminal space in which the Elder-at-the-Fire inculcates the missional life through discipleship.

Acquiring this identity comes by abiding in the Christ-narrative, a narrative that ties past experiences, traditions, wisdom, and rites of passage with current and forthcoming cultural challenges and leads into the future. Narrative and story are vehicles that transport experiences or a message into the lives of others. Story identifies the characters, the setting, and the sequence of time and events. Eugene Peterson describes

⁴¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999). 1.

story as “the most natural way of enlarging and deepening our sense of reality, and then enlisting us as participants in it.”⁴²

An epic story, a story that offers meaning to an individual’s life and existence, a story that extends hope to a hurting world, has the ability to rekindle dying embers and inflame an inner fire or zeal for passing forward the missiogenepic story. Such a fire is central to Missional Generativity as one that fuels the passion and purpose of an Elder-at-the-Fire.

An Elder-at-the-Fire enters into the narration of the missiogenepic story. In so doing, the Elder-at-the-Fire emulates Jesus in becoming the Word made flesh, particularly in the critical role of apprenticing new Elders to build and advance a discipleship ethos into future generations.

Entering into the missiogenepic story and passing it on are essential in this day and age where false narratives abound. The internet, news sources, and social media have caused a proliferation of counterfeit narratives. As narratives are becoming more diverse, diluted, and contaminated, finding meaning and truth becomes increasingly more difficult. Unfortunately, many people, as humorously portrayed in a popular television commercial, accept these narratives as if “they cannot put anything on the internet that is not true.”⁴³ Humankind’s nature is to seek context and meaning to make sense of the joys and pitfalls along life’s journey; story is the vehicle that facilitates contextualization and meaning-making. In a world with an expanding need to find meaning amidst the Tesarac,

⁴² Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 13.

⁴³ “French Model State Farms Commercial.” YouTube, accessed October 26, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOzAgpxg5wE>.

the Elder-at-the-Fire's role to guide others into living the missiogenepic story and to act as a spiritual sage is crucial.

Elder-at-the-Fire

“The practice of seeking out guides, mentors, or soul-friends who might give some direction in the journey toward spirituality is an ancient one.”⁴⁴ The world is hungry for spiritual elders, and the Church has access to the greatest resource to assist others on their journey; however, it lacks leaders who have been developed to the level of maturity required for the role of an Elder-at-the-Fire. As discussed earlier, the American Church recognizes the need for and importance of deeper levels of spiritual guidance; this is evidenced by the plethora of information and programs geared toward mentoring, coaching, educating, and discipling others. While the opportunities for spiritual development are vast, their effectiveness is minimal. In the book *Christ's Call to Discipleship*, theologian James Boice describes this predicament.

There is a fatal defect in the life of Christ's church in the twentieth century: a lack of true discipleship. Discipleship means forsaking everything to follow Christ. But for many of today's supposed Christians—perhaps the majority—it is the case that while there is much talk about Christ and even much furious activity, there is very little following of Christ Himself. And that means in some circles there is very little genuine Christianity. ... We should not be surprised by this because Jesus Himself said that this would be the case. But we should be distressed by it.⁴⁵

Missiologist Alan Hirsch expands on the problem by describing the predicament in which the Church finds itself:

⁴⁴ Kurtz, *Spirituality of Imperfection*, 24.

⁴⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2013), 13.

The dilemma we face today in regard to this issue is that while we have a historical language of discipleship, our actual practice of discipleship is far from consistent, and as a result this mismatch tends to obscure the centrality of the problem. I think it is fair to say that in the Western church, we have by and large lost the art of disciple making. We have done so partly because we have reduced it to the intellectual assimilation of ideas, partly because of the abiding impact of cultural Christianity embedded in the Christendom understanding of church, and partly because the phenomenon of consumerism in our own day pushes against a true following of Jesus.⁴⁶

In a society marked by commuting, conveniences, commercialism, and technology, the permanence and solidity of institutional and social structures has quietly been eroding. The American Church has not escaped the covert corrosion to its spiritual foundation, including the zeal for fully committed discipleship. One of the tectonic shifts produced by the Tetsuaro has been a moving away from reverence for the aged wisdom-keepers who once provided guidance and understanding for life's journey toward an adulation of youth and fun, thereby relegating societies' would-be elders to a retirement mentality. This shift crept into the Church's culture as well, and, in doing so, disrupted the important duty of disciple development. The Church needs new elders to take up this role, men and women who hear God's voice and are willing to enter the discipline of becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. In so doing, these new Elders will, like the ancient Hebrew elder Moses, fulfill the scripture that says, "When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders came to me. And you said, 'The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire'" (Dt 5:23-24). This is the fire at which the elder sits and from which the story is shared.

⁴⁶ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 103-4.

Hearing God's voice from the fire is essential to any calling. The calling of an Elder-at-the-Fire is critical to helping others move through the Tesarac by apprenticing disciples to take on the role of Elder-at-the-Fire for upcoming generations. Elders-at-the-Fire establish their eldership in Missional Generativity by living in the missiogenepic narrative of Christ, becoming this story made flesh to the world. The Elder-at-the-Fire thus becomes a generative force in aiding others to become a missional people—to live a life of Missional Generativity.

Fire Metaphor

Like in ancient times when the fire was a central meeting place for primitive society, Missional Generativity is the fire to which the Elder-at-the-Fire draws others. Missional Generativity's fire is the manifestation of God's presence, the same fire in which God revealed himself to Moses and by which he led the Israelites at night. This fire is core to Missional Generativity and provides the metaphor represented in the role of the Elder-at-the-Fire.

Most Americans are familiar with old Western television shows depicting Indians sitting around the fire while the Chief imparted wisdom to his tribe. For many Native American tribes, as well as other tribes around the world, tribal community life revolved around the fire out of necessity. The fire provided a sense of security, light, and warmth, a place to prepare food for nourishment, a gathering place for tribal ceremonies and rituals, a communication tool, and a theater in which the elders wove stories to pass forward their wisdom. "In past times, elders were storytellers precisely because they were wisdom carriers. To carry wisdom meant to relate how and why things had always been

done, in order to help people at each stage of life understand their role and responsibilities in the community.”⁴⁷

Richard Leider, founder and chairman of *The Inventure Group*, a coaching and consulting firm, relates a current day experience while visiting the Hadza people, a tribal community in Tanzania. His visit included a tribal fire experience in which the Hadza elders shared stories of tribal wisdom and values. As Leider and his team stared into the flames contemplating the stories related to them, a Hadza elder turned to Leider and asked him who the elders in his tribe were. Leider had no response. This experience stirred a passion in him to identify what elders should be, which he documented in his book, *Claiming Your Place at the Fire*. In it Leider identifies four vital flames necessary to being an elder:

1. the flame of identity—recalling our stories
2. the flame of community—re-finding our place
3. the flame of passion—renewing our calling
4. the flame of meaning—reclaiming our purpose

These flames are shared by what he terms as “new elders,” individuals who, like elders of the Hadza tribe, claim their place at the fire to synthesize and transmit the wisdom of the past into the current culture.⁴⁸

Catholic theologian Ronald Rolheiser has also studied the need for elders. He observed that “New elders harvest and transfer the wisdom of the past into the present. They know the important narratives of their culture ... Elders teach by story ... [which] is

⁴⁷ Ray and Anderson, *Cultural Creatives*, 300.

⁴⁸ Richard Leider and David Shapiro, *Claiming Your Place at the Fire; Living the Second Half of Your Life on Purpose* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2004), ix-xv.

an ability to touch the lives and lived-experience of others through their own experiences in a manner that brings it alive in the present, through the past.”⁴⁹

Leider’s four flames can easily be transferred to Christian discipleship, particularly when these flames ignite the missional, relational, and incarnational components of Missional Generativity. Fanning the embers of identity, community, passion, and purpose through the missiogenepic story brings to life the fire of Missional Generativity—the presence of God. Metaphorically, the Elder-at-the-Fire is an elder who sits in the presence of God, and from that position relationally shares the missiogenepic story with those who are drawn to the fire. True Christ-discipleship can only be achieved in the presence of the Fire.

To further understand this metaphor, it is helpful to understand the components of fire. There are three components necessary to ignite a fire: oxygen, fuel, and heat. When these three components meet, an exothermic reaction occurs producing flames. This chemical chain response remains in effect as long as there are adequate combustible materials, oxygen, and heat to sustain or grow the fire. Without each of these elements, the fire will not ignite. If one element is removed, an active fire will eventually be extinguished.⁵⁰

In Figure 7, these elements are related to the Missional Generativity triad to help form the fire metaphor. Missional (generative way) represents the combustible fuel necessary for a fire; incarnational supplies life-giving oxygen (generative life); and relational (generative truth/love) is the frictional element that causes heat. As in a

⁴⁹ Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 3.

⁵⁰ James Angle, *Firefighting Strategies and Tactics* (Albany, NY: Delmar Thomson Learning, 2001), 33.

physical fire, if an element of Missional Generativity is missing, the fire will not be ignited or will be snuffed out. Each part of Missional Generativity is essential to the fire metaphor.

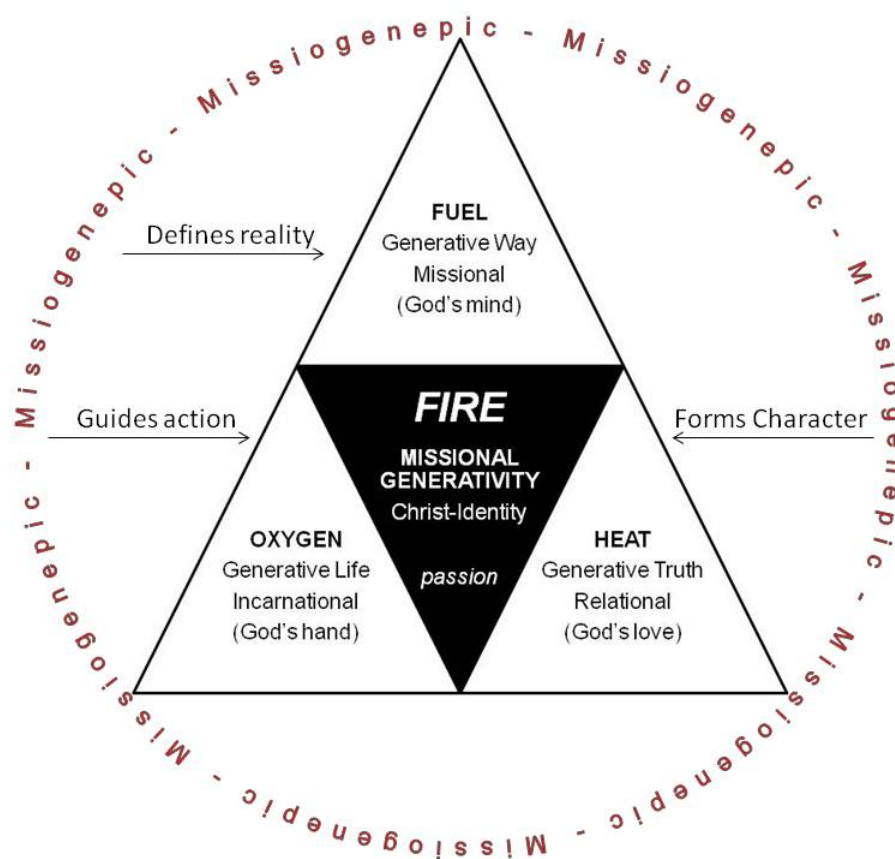


Figure 7 – Fire of Missional Generativity

When missional fuel encounters incarnational oxygen and relational heat, the three generate an uninhibited energy which combusts into flames. These flames symbolize the passion, power, and presence of the divine Deity (Col 2:9) as illuminated through God's Light to the world (Jn 8:12), and is core to the very nature of Missional Generativity.

In the Old Testament, fire often indicates God's presence (Gn 15:17; Ex 3:2-12, 13:21-22; Lv 9:24); the Hebrew term for fire is "אש" and is transliterated into English as

esh, pronounced “aysh.” The first letter in the Hebrew alphabet is *aleph*, equivalent to Greek’s *alpha* and the English letter ‘A,’ and is the first letter in fire (*esh*). The second character in the Hebrew word for fire is *shin*, which pictographically could represent the flames of a fire.

Rabbi Akiva, a well-revered Jewish Sage often referred to as the father of rabbinical Judaism,⁵¹ examined each letter of Hebrew words to fully understand the context and distill their meaning. Akiva’s study of ‘esh’ in conjunction with the Hebrew terms for ‘man’ and ‘woman’ shows that ‘esh’ is a part of both words. He taught that God took letters from his own name, *yod* and *heh*, to adjoin with ‘esh’ and establish man and woman, and in so doing placed his presence—fire—in both man and woman. This is further explained in that if man and woman “are deserving, God’s Presence dwells in their midst. If they are not deserving, fire devours them. ... From this we learn that there is a consuming fire in the heart of every man and woman.”⁵² Breaking down these terms by the letter, Akiva explained how he arrived at this concept: “The Hebrew word for man is *ish* spelled *aleph, yod, shin*. Remove the *yod*, and you have *aleph, shin*, or *esh*, meaning fire. The Hebrew word for woman is *ishah*, spelled *aleph, shin, heh*. Remove the *heh* and, once again, you have *esh*, meaning ‘fire.’ In that way, both man and woman retain in their names the word ‘fire.’”⁵³

Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David completed a study of “fire” in the Torah to identify its usage and application. His method of study was patterned after a common rule handed

⁵¹ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Akiba Ben Joseph,” accessed November 18, 2015, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1033-akiba-ben-joseph>.

⁵² Eliyahu Ki Tov, *The Jew and his Home*, 14th ed. (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1985, 1963), 39-40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 39.

down by Jewish sages on how to go about understanding a word's fundamental significance. This rule required that "it must be examined in its original context. The context of the first use of a word in the Torah gives us the word's essential meaning."⁵⁴ Killian claims that the first usage of the word *aysh* (translated as a burning lamp) is in the account of the Lord's covenant-making with Abraham (Gn 15:17) and explains that this "teaches us that it's [sic] essence is related to HaShem [God], who used the fire to communicate his presence and his desire to make a unilateral covenant with Avraham."⁵⁵

In addition to God's covenant with Abraham and God's appearance to Moses in the burning bush and guiding the Israelites by fire at night, multiple instances abound in the Bible that associate fire with God. The Israelites also associated fire with God's power and judgment, and the use of fire was a prominent part of their worship and religious practices.⁵⁶ One of their practices was the use of burnt offerings to make atonement for sin. God's instructions were specific on the process, commanding them to not allow the fire on the sacrificial altar to go out, to keep it burning at all times (Lv 6:6-13). Jesus' death atoned for all sin, ending the need for the burnt offerings required by the Law.

As a witness, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his disciples, appearing as "tongues of fire" (Acts 2:3). John the Baptist prophesized this when he told the crowd, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose

⁵⁴ Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David, "Fire," The Watchman, December 18, 2007, accessed September 12, 2013, <http://www.betemunah.org/fire.html>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Herbert Lockyer, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary: An Authoritative One-Volume Reference Work On the Bible, with Full-Color Illustrations* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1986), 384. s. v. "Fire."

sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Mt 3:11).

Fire, as depicted in Figure 8, is central to the role of Elder-at-the-Fire and might also be described as God’s fire in us, thereby creating a spirit of generativity that is the burning essence of Missional Generativity. The metaphor of fire as the presence of God that covenants with, and communicates to, mankind is also a metaphor of Christ’s power, guidance, and indwelling of the Holy Spirit; it is a life-giving, healing fire.

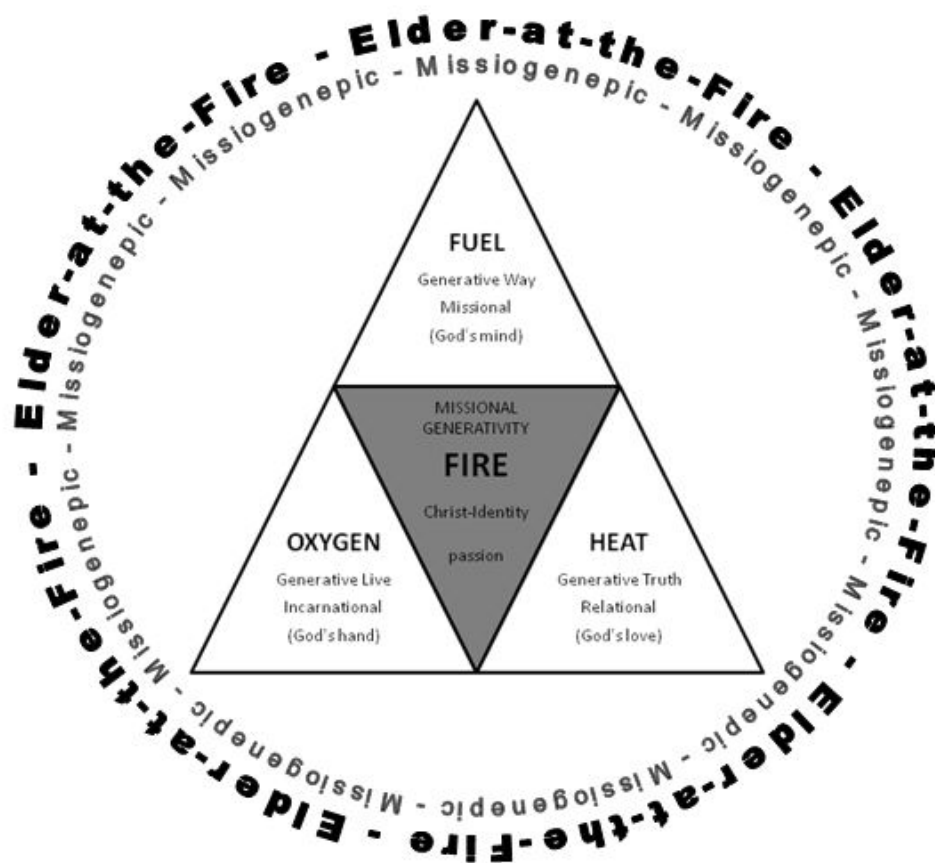


Figure 8 - Elder-at-the-Fire

Missional Generativity is further defined by what we do with the fire within and how it is integrated into personal relationships within the community of the Church and society. It is not confined to sharing with younger generations or a select group of people;

Missional Generativity is the desire to share the love of Jesus Christ with *all* generations, all persons present and future. It is a forward-sharing of a historic, redemptive, living story in the context of today's culture.

The Church is in great need of leaders who are willing to stir the embers and reignite the flames. The Church needs Elders-at-the-Fire to rekindle the passion for the missiogenic narrative. The Church needs Elders-at-the-Fire to encourage others to keep the flames burning to offer meaning in the midst of a self-centered, chaotic culture. The Church needs Elders-at-the-Fire to replicate themselves in others who in turn become disciples of the Fire, eventually passing the torch to future generations. Such is the role and calling of the Elder-at-the-Fire.

Role and Characteristics

Who is an Elder-at-the-Fire? An Elder-at-the-Fire is a follower of Christ, yet an ordinary person with strengths and weaknesses, hopes and dreams, trials and joys, just like any other person. An Elder-at-the-Fire may be a pastor, teacher, leader in the church, janitor, store clerk, doctor, missionary, or garbage collector. The identity of an Elder-at-the-Fire is not determined by age, gender, race, title, vocation, position, or role in ministry; rather, it is demonstrated in Missional Generativity—going out, embodying the Gospel message, and investing in lives for the purpose of making new disciples and developing them to become an Elder-at-the-Fire.

British evangelist T. Austin Sparks describes this concept: “the identity of the vessel with its ministry is the very heart of Divine thought. A man is called to represent the thoughts of God, to represent them in what he *is*, not in something that he takes up as

a form or line of ministry, not in something that he does. The vessel itself is the ministry and you cannot divide between the two.”⁵⁷

The most effective Elders-at-the-Fire are “story-listeners, story-evokers, artists and teachers of every sort who can call forth the stories we need now.”⁵⁸ As wisdom carriers of the missiogenepic story, an Elder-at-the-Fire learns to decipher the cultural context and makes use of metaphor to weave the message into a present-day perspective that provides meaning for the listener. The Elder-at-the-Fire seeks to incarnate the missiogenepic narrative, to literally flesh out a witness that bears light to the world and draws others into the missiogenepic story. The missiogenepic story is always working in the future—the story is written forward. The Elder-at-the-Fire has the advantage of knowing the story looking back and passes it onto their disciple while the Holy Spirit is all the while continuing to direct the story forward.

The Elder-at-the-Fire is compelled to share wisdom not to display a wealth of knowledge; their purpose is not to expound on theories, doctrines, or a set of mores or rules, but to share heart wisdom (Ps 51:6, 90:12). Heart wisdom is more insightful than cerebral knowledge; it is a life-giving wisdom that dwells in the deepest, hidden places of the heart (Prov 4). It is “first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (Ja 3:17). Heart wisdom is a dwelling place for Jesus to make the Word flesh (Jn 1:14), not a vault from which to store and disseminate facts. Episcopal Priest, Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault, describes this type of wisdom as “a way of knowing [that] requires the whole of one’s being and is ultimately

⁵⁷ T. Austin Sparks, *Prophetic Ministry: A Classic Study on the Nature of a Prophet* (Shippensburg, PA: MercyPlace Ministries, 2000), 15.

⁵⁸ Ray and Anderson, *Cultural Creatives*, 300.

attained only through the yielding of one's whole being into the intimacy of knowing and being known."⁵⁹ The knowing of which Rev. Bourgeault speaks is an intimate knowing of Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). A heart completely surrendered to Christ assimilates all other knowledge, and with the Holy Spirit's guidance is able to share wisdom from heart to heart as needed. Thus, heart wisdom extends itself as a form of grace.

For the Elder-at-the-Fire, heart wisdom is born from a depth of experiences and faith, and a life surrendered to Jesus Christ. Wisdom of the heart is nurtured by studying God's Word, spending time in prayer and reflection, exercising faith, listening to the Holy Spirit, and developing an intimate personal relationship with God. Sharing heart wisdom generatively transfers Truth into the hearts and lives of others; thus the Elder-at-the-Fire does not view wisdom as something to possess but as something to give away.

An Elder-at-the-Fire also serves as a guide, trailblazer, or explorer who forges a path in faith; this faith is "confidence in what we hope for and assurance of what we do not see" (Heb 11:1). Keeping a clear vision of the journey's goal, the guide advises and shows the way, instructing and teaching along the way, and compassionately provides counsel to navigate life's course (Ps 32:3). As explorers, Elders-at-the-Fire must act as scouts who read the landscape and effectively interpret and communicate signs and signals in order to guide others to safe passage. They must be trailblazers, men and women creating new forms and designing innovative pathways to facilitate moving our narratives into the future. The Elder-at-the-Fire is willing to enter the unknown, with the

⁵⁹ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2003), 10.

assurance of knowing life is in God's hands, and, with this assurance, risks entering into the mystery and chaos of the Tesarac to carry the missiogenepic story forward.

An Elder-at-the-Fire extends generously to others and is "committed to sharing her or his wisdom and remaining accessible to those who might be served."⁶⁰ The Elder-at-the-Fire has the capacity to set aside biases and meet others in a spirit of acceptance and generative love through relational mutuality. The Elder-at-the-Fire listens with the heart, asking probing questions that cause the hearer to reflect and respond while being open-minded to their social and cultural differences.

The Elder-at-the-Fire does not shy away from self-evaluation but rather is a constant learner who desires to leave a spiritual legacy, serves others without need for reciprocity, values all human life, and is concerned for all creation. This Elder is also characterized by a discerning spirit, an ability to translate life's trials into valuable lessons, being a creative thinker, having strong faith, knowing how to mourn and how to rejoice, approaching others in a spirit of mutuality, and serving with humility.

Jesus' mission was not a one-time mission spanning thirty-three years and ending with crucifixion; it was intended to continue through his followers, extending to all generations. In turn, the mission of the Elder-at-the-Fire is to pass on the Fire of Missional Generativity that originates from God.

The Elder-at-the-Fire's fervor is not necessarily for a specific ministry or position within a local church; it involves a burning desire to nurture and cultivate others by communicating spiritual values and wisdom for the benefit of present and future generations. Central to the Elder-at-the-Fire is a passion to continue the mission of Jesus,

⁶⁰ Jones, *Elder*, ii.

the *missio dei*. This passion is inherent to being a fully devoted disciple of Jesus today just as it was for his disciples, and is based in the charge Jesus gave to “make disciples.” This was not merely a request; it was a command with specific instructions to spread the gospel narrative to the whole world, and to baptize and teach new disciples to obey all that he commanded (Mt 28:18-20). “Jesus’ words reveal his heart and priority. They also indicate the method that will fulfill God’s plan to rescue the world.”⁶¹

The Elder who remains in the Fire’s presence is equipped with the spiritual gifts necessary to train and build up the body of Christ. These gifts assist the Elder in carrying out spiritual works for the purpose of discipling leaders toward spiritual maturity (Eph 4:11-13). “The aim ... is nothing less than to produce men and women who have in them the reflection of Jesus Christ himself.”⁶²

Being an Elder-at-the-Fire is a calling to radical discipleship—the kind of discipleship that goes beyond being a Christ-follower to that of being crucified and risen with Christ. The question for today’s Church is, “who will be the Elders-at-the-Fire drawing others into a relationship of mutuality within the story?”

*Do you realize what I have done for you?
I have given you a model to follow,
So that as I have done this for you,
You should also do.*

—Jesus (Jn 13:12b, 15 NABRE)

⁶¹ Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*, 16.

⁶² William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 150.

Becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire

An Elder-at-the-Fire answers the call to dwell in the presence of the Fire by embarking upon a pilgrimage to Missional Generativity. This calling involves a deep, burning passion to invest long-term in another's life by passing on spiritual wisdom and truth; in essence, to serve as a spiritual sage. The path to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire is not an easy road and is fraught with obstacles, disappointments, peril, and insecurities; the cost may seem high to the traveler, but the rewards are great. The pilgrimage of an Elder-at-the-Fire is an act of initiation and apprenticeship, not a journey to a specific arrival point. The editors of the book *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook*, describe such an odyssey.

Being a spiritual elder is not a destination where we arrive but rather a capacity that we can become in any moment. Becoming a spiritual elder is the culmination of what has come before in terms of spiritual growth and capacity to understand and discern the demands of a specific situation. It is a moving mosaic that requires the capacity to be intensely present and at the same time to transcend our purely personal perspectives. Becoming a spiritual elder is also an evolution that couples a mature inner connection to the sacred with action in social roles.⁶³

The desire to become an Elder-at-the-Fire involves an intense yearning for a deeper level of knowing and intimacy with Christ; it is an ache for spiritual significance personally, but also for making a difference in others' lives, and for leaving a spiritual legacy. The Elder-at-the-Fire is a constant learner, recognizing the need for growth, not just in knowing the scriptures or the stories of the Bible, but in an intense desire for the mystery of Jesus Christ that goes beyond understanding. "This yearning prompts us to

⁶³ Melvin Kimble and Susan McFadden, *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook*, vol.2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 2:33.

search within the source of spiritual connectedness. Out of this search comes wisdom ... which we can transmit to the generations that follow.”⁶⁴

The Elder-at-the-Fire, therefore, must have done the inner work necessary to be an agent of Missional Generativity for the sake of providing Christ-centered eldering to the disciple. “Spiritual eldering implies an inner search for God, a self-directed flowering of the spirit that unites all people in a common quest, no matter their affiliation.”⁶⁵ This entails an inner transformation of the Elder-at-the-Fire, a transformation acquired through a process of submitting to Christ’s pruning, purifying, and preparing (Jn 15:2).

The path to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire is a long, sacred journey into the Holy of Holies—a pilgrimage to Missional Generativity through the cross. Jesus warned that the way of the cross would be a difficult journey; the cross means pain, suffering, rejection, and death. After teaching his disciples about this, Jesus describes the qualifications of being a true disciple, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it” (Mk 8:34-35). This is a hard concept to bear, yet indispensable to the heart and life fully devoted to Christ’s service. Christ endured the cross because he knew the hope and joy it would bring. For this reason, Christians are encouraged to persevere by staying the narrow path with eyes fixed on Jesus (Heb 12:1-3).

This spiritual quest is a deep, inner journey to meet the Author of Life and to enter into his pain, his discipline, his healing, his wholeness, and his mysteries to emerge

⁶⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁵ Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Ronald Miller, *From Age-Ing to Sage-Ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older* (New York: Warner Books, 1995), 39.

with the wisdom and experience necessary for the calling of Elder-at-the-Fire. The Elder-at-the-Fire says, “I want to work on myself, even if that means facing past and present anxieties. I want to be generous, pure, and clean in facing the Spirit. I want to live the truth.”⁶⁶

In living in the Truth, the Elder-at-the-Fire continues faithfully to tell the story and trains others to take up this calling; however, not all disciples will become an Elder-at-the-Fire. Some may elect to train as an Elder-at-the-Fire, but decide it is not his or her true calling. In this case the Elder-at-the-Fire assists the disciple in finding what God appointed them to be. Others, as in biblical times, may find the path too arduous; however, there are also examples of those who stayed the course despite adversity and trials. The key is full submission, full surrender, and willingness to leave the plow, nets, family, security, and so forth, and be willing to fully enter the missiogenepic narrative, whatever the cost. Jesus cautioned his followers to consider the cost: “Any of you who does not give up everything cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:33).

Elders-at-the-Fire are the critical agents essential to incarnating the missiogenepic story through Christ’s Missional Generativity, and therefore have the responsibility to develop others to become Elders-at-the-Fire in interactive relationship. If this role is not passed on, the purpose of an Elder-at-the-Fire is not accomplished.

It is the calling of both—the Elder-at-the-Fire and the disciple—that is essential for Missional Generativity and to the role of Elder-at-the-Fire. This is what is unique to generativity in the spiritual realm; it is not just about making a better future, but is part of the larger missiogenepic story that carries the hope of things unseen. The Elder-at-the-

⁶⁶ Ibid., 40.

Fire knows this mystery but cannot fully explain it or see it; he or she relies on the Holy Spirit to direct the story. God executes the calling, arranging the circumstances which bring the Elder and disciplee together into relationship. The Elder-at-the-Fire's role is to listen for the Spirit's prompting and pay attention to those whom God may place in his or her life. The Elder has "the responsibility to keep the consciousness of the whole at all times,"⁶⁷ and in so doing will recognize God's appointed apprentice.

When a disciple is receptive to the Holy Spirit's guidance and submits to the direction and teaching from the Elder-at-the-Fire, he or she is co-writing the forward direction of the missiogenepic story. The Elder-at-the-Fire and disciplee work together to write the story forward, persevering in faith, just as the biblical ancients did. In doing so, the disciple will one day enter the calling and sit at the Fire as an Elder.

An Elder-at-the-Fire is one whose heart is burning to pass on the missiogenepic story, even though he or she may never see their vision come to fruition or recognize their significance in the story. Like Moses, Abraham, Joseph, David, Solomon, Stephen, Paul, and many more, each had a role to play—prepared ahead of time by God's design, despite no observable results during their lifetime that kept them moving forward (Heb 11). The compelling factor motivating them onward was a strong faith in the missiogenepic story and that God would bring his promises to fulfillment, whether in their lifetime or in future generations.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 38.

Biblical Examples

Biblical elders lived in close communion with God, enabling them to hear and obey his Word and communicate it to others. Empowered by the Spirit of God, they passed along and upheld the Truth, not only for themselves, but for their family, tribe, and nation. Like Christ, biblical elders strived to cultivate a missional heart in others. Biblical elders came from all walks of life and shared wisdom and a spiritual knowledge to young and old, from shepherd boys to kings. The Bible contains many examples of relationships that exemplify an Elder-at-the-Fire with his protégé, including: Eli to Samuel, Samuel to David, Naomi to Ruth, Mordecai to Esther, Moses to Joshua, and Paul to Timothy. This following portion of this segment explores the eldership relationship between Elijah and Elisha as precursor to the New Testament example of Jesus with his twelve disciples, and submits these as examples of an Elder-at-the-Fire. These examples provide a two-pronged approach as applied to an Elder-at-the-Fire. The example of Elijah illustrates the journey of *becoming* an Elder-at-the-Fire while Jesus' life exemplifies *being* an Elder-at-the-Fire.

The biblical story of Elijah, as recorded in 1 Kings 17:1 through 2 Kings 11, is a dynamic example of a life empowered by God. Although his vocational calling was that of a prophet, his life also later modeled that of an Elder-at-the-Fire. Not much is known about Elijah; he seemingly came out of nowhere, but when he appeared on the scene it was with dynamic purpose. Despite his obscurity, Elijah's life was exemplified by God's power and a passion that fueled obedience and commitment to God's truth.

At this point, it is important to note that when Elijah is introduced into the story he already had received a calling upon his life and was engaged in that ministry.

However, he was not yet an Elder-at-the-Fire; this calling would come later, after Elijah had gained more experience and wisdom. This is also true of today's Christian leaders; being in a ministry role does not qualify the leader to be an Elder-at-the-Fire. Elijah only became an Elder-at-the-Fire when God deemed him prepared and worthy.

Elijah is introduced as a fiery prophet who, with audacity and courage, confronts evil King Ahab. The king had married Jezebel and adopted her gods as his own, forsaking the God of Israel and provoking God more "than all the kings of Israel who went before him" (1 Kgs 16:33b). Into this setting, God sent Elijah as his voice, to call King Ahab and all of Israel back to obedience as God's chosen people. Elijah established his authority in God by declaring his position as God's servant and announcing a forthcoming draught. Elijah was so convinced in the authority God had given him that he declared to King Ahab that only upon his words would the drought cease. It is not apparent how Elijah came to have such confidence in God, or how he came to understand himself as God's representative to impart this prophecy over an evil kingdom. However, his dedication, commitment, and trust in God are apparent and must be the result of a progressive understanding of the nature of God and a life deeply committed to his service. As God's servant, Elijah was faithful to the calling of prophet, despite any danger it presented to him. Elijah's dramatic entrance onto the scene indicates his acceptance of God's calling upon his life.

Immediately following Elijah's pronouncement to King Ahab, God instructed Elijah to head east to hide out in the Kerith Ravine from which he was to drink from the brook and rely on ravens for meals. God's care and provision for Elijah further illustrates a close relationship; however, it is difficult to imagine the fear and loneliness Elijah must

have felt, let alone the strangeness of being fed by birds. Thus began Elijah's journey with God, not only to further prepare for his role as a prophet, but also to develop him to as an Elder-at-the-Fire. Elijah had to first be separated from the world, to hide in a quiet, lonely place and to stay there until the "brook was dry" (1 Kgs 17:7). In this environment Elijah learned to wholly rely on God for his sustenance, as there was little to no provision for self-reliance.

Following his stay at Kerith, God instructed Elijah to journey to Zarephath, where God would further provide for his care through the assistance of a widow woman. Upon arriving, Elijah found the widow woman preparing for her last meal for herself and her son, certain that death was the only option left. Widows were to be cared for, and here came a man requesting her to feed him from the last of her resources. This must have been a humbling experience for Elijah, but the stay at Kerith had taught him that God provides for those whose hearts are devoted to him. With this knowledge, Elijah assured the widow woman that if she was faithful to God, he would not only meet her needs, but exceed them. Elijah now recognized his responsibility in the care of others, and his time with the widow and her son begins the relational component necessary to become an Elder-at-the-Fire. Over a period of time, the widow came to trust Elijah, but her trust was focused on Elijah and not on Elijah's God. When the widow's son later died, Elijah persevered before God on the widow's behalf and prayed her son back to life. This must have been a heart-wrenching time for Elijah; the widow and her son had become his family and for the son to die after experiencing God's miraculous provision life-sustaining food, God took the breath of life from the son. An Elder-at-the-Fire is called upon to share in Christ's sufferings. Indeed, this was a trial of suffering for Elijah.

Sufferings are not without purpose, and this event provided an opportunity for further development in Elijah's life and deeper reliance on God. It also provided a means for Elijah to demonstrate God's power to the widow woman, who then declared, "Now I know that you are a man of God" (1 Kgs 17:24). God's answer to Elijah's prayer demonstrated his life-giving power, causing the widow to transfer her faith in Elijah to the Living God. This was Elijah's first life-changing, life-giving eldering experience, and emphasizes the power of prayer and close communion with God.

After a time, God revealed to Elijah that it was time to return to Ahab. Immediately Elijah obeyed and set out to dispute the power of the false gods, challenging the Israelites to return to the true God. Elijah's time at Kerith and Zarephath had prepared him for this awesome task, enabling Elijah to call down the Lord's fire upon the altar of sacrifice—God answered! Elijah subsequently eliminated the false prophets, angering Ahab and Jezebel and causing him to flee for his life and once again hide.

Elijah's circumstances seemed pitiful; he had worked zealously for God, yet all he could see was a nation who had cut herself off from God. Elijah's despair was so great, he felt like he was the only prophet left, and hunted by his enemies with no one to carry on God's work should he die. When God met Elijah on the mountain and asked what he was doing there, Elijah complained that he was the only prophet left. God then asked Elijah to "stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by" (1 Kgs 19:11). Through powerful winds, earthquakes, and a fire Elijah waited and listened, and finally he heard God's gentle whisper. Once again God asked what Elijah was doing there. Elijah cried, "I am the only one," voicing his inner need to become an Elder-at-the-Fire. God heard his cry and told Elijah to go back the way he came,

instructing him to anoint two kings and, more importantly, to anoint Elisha as his successor. Elijah has passed his rites of initiation and in this act he is recognized as being commissioned as an Elder-at-the-Fire. This anointing not only demonstrates God's authority over Elijah as an Elder-at-the-Fire, but further emphasizes that God is the one who chooses whom to anoint. This is a critical point of understanding for the Elder-at-the-Fire.

Elijah's place in the missiogenepic story was not just to pass judgment or overcome Baal worshippers. God had a larger purpose; he set Elijah into a time of fear and doubt, with a judgmental attitude toward Israel, to remind them of the one true God and bring them back to obedience. Additionally, God called Elijah to be an Elder-at-the-Fire; to train and transfer his mantle to Elisha.

Although most Christians are not called to the types of prophetic adventures and miracles characterized in Elijah's vocational calling, the progression of events in Elijah's life help provide an understanding of the elements essential in becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. At Kerith Elijah was set apart to learn total reliance on God. Elijah's Zarephath experience taught him humility, compassion, and how to seek God's power. In challenging the Baals he relied on courage, faith, and trust, and called down the fire of God; and in the midst of storms he learned to listen for and hear God's voice. All these points of progress directed Elijah to become an Elder-at-the-Fire. Elijah immediately set out, and upon finding Elisha, covered him with his mantle, thereby indicating Elisha as the chosen one to be his successor. In so doing, Elijah and Elisha thus signified the beginning of a discipleship relationship to prepare Elisha to carry on the work Elijah

began. Elisha's response to his calling was immediate. He settled his affairs and, giving up all he had, separated from his old life to begin apprenticeship and service with Elijah.

The culmination of the eldering relationship between Elijah and Elisha is evidenced by the process and manner in which the anointing was transferred. Although Elisha was aware that Elijah's departure from earth was imminent, he refused to leave his side. It is a testament to Elijah's life that Elisha requests to be bequeathed a double portion of Elijah's spirit—in other words, he wanted more of God. However, Elijah made no promise except, "If you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not" (2 Kgs 2:10). This may seem a terse statement, but points out a bigger truth Elijah had come to understand. As God chose whom Elijah should anoint, God would also determine whether or not Elisha was worthy to receive the mantle and carry on Elijah's anointing.

While engaged in the ordinary events of life, walking and talking, Elijah was suddenly taken up to heaven by a chariot and horses of fire. Because Elisha's heart was right, he was witness to the event; as a result, Elijah's mantle fell from the sky, signifying the transfer of Elijah's spirit. Elisha accepted the mantle, thus transferring Elijah's anointing to a new generation. Elisha's life and ministry further demonstrate that he not only learned from Elijah, but also became an Elder-at-the-Fire, and in the spirit of Missional Generativity went on to do more.

This is the objective of an Elder-at-the-Fire, to apprentice disciples toward becoming worthy of the anointing. Elisha would not have received the mantle had he not willingly left all and committed his life to serve under the apprenticeship of Elijah, an Elder-at-the-Fire. Additionally, the mantle would have been worthless if Elisha had not

chosen to pick it up or use it. By using the mantle, Elisha signified full acceptance and willingness to the role he had been called; it also became a sign to those watching that God had appointed him as Elijah's successor. Elisha's ministry tapped into the double portion of power and blessing that he inherited.

The path of the Elder-at-the-Fire always begins during a gestation period, a time of obscurity. Like Elijah, Jesus came from obscurity, the son of a simple carpenter. However, unlike Elijah's account, the Bible provides some record regarding Jesus' earlier spiritual instruction. Luke records Jesus sitting with the religious elders of the day asking questions and amazing them with his grasp of the scriptures (Lk 2:52). A developmental period is essential to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire; even God in the flesh learned the scriptures and grew in favor with God and man in order to form the character and passion that would prepare him for his calling. Likewise, the Elder-at-the-Fire is prepared by years of study and preparation; obtaining knowledge of the scriptures and inculcating their meaning arms the Elder-at-the-Fire to be ready to answer for the hope that marks the Elder's life (1 Pt 3:15). Scripture also admonishes, "keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Jo 1:8).

It is interesting to note that Jesus' ministry also began with public acknowledgement. First John the Baptist announced that one would come after him who "would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Mt 3:11). After John baptized Jesus, God confirmed him as his son, thereby establishing Jesus' authority in God's Kingdom. Immediately following this acknowledgement, Jesus was sent out for a Kerith experience—forty days in the desert. Like Elijah, this wilderness experience was

necessary in order for Jesus to be fully ready to enter his ministry. Herein is where a key difference lies. Elijah's experience stripped him of all he was and caused him to rely fully on God for his sustenance and protection. This was necessary for Elijah to be emptied of self and be completely filled with God's power to accomplish the tasks set before him. Jesus, on the other hand, was already filled with the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:13-16) and he was literally sent into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan.

Jesus spent forty days fasting and praying to prepare himself, and when he became hungry Satan came to tempt him, knowing Jesus would be in a weakened state. The first two temptations challenged Jesus' claim of being God's Son. Satan taunted Jesus and directly appealed to his hunger and secondly to his abilities. The third temptation was the most crucial; Satan offered Jesus the kingdom of earth in exchange for allegiance to him. In each case, Satan struck at a human temptation: flesh, pride, and power, but Christ countered each with the Word of God and finally commanded Satan to leave (Mt 4:1-11).

In the experience of Elijah, we learn that the Elder-at-the-Fire must be emptied of self and learn to rely fully on God's power. Jesus' encounter with Satan provides an example of the ability God's people have to resist sin through the power of the Holy Spirit, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." (Heb 4:15).

The accounts of Elijah and Jesus emphasize the significance of being in God's presence, knowing his Word, and the importance of prayer. There are many other commonalities in the ministry and miracles of Elijah's and Jesus' ministry; however,

Jesus' ministry provides more insight into the Missional Generativity factor as it relates to the role of an Elder-at-the-Fire. Unlike Elijah, whose role as an Elder-at-the-Fire occurred later in his ministry, from the time shortly after Jesus entered into his public ministry he began calling and discipling others.

Although young in age, Jesus' level of maturity and understanding of God's Law astounded the religious leaders of his day. In fact, his grasp was so solid that the Chief Priests and teachers felt threatened and sought to discount his teachings. That Jesus' message was widely popular is a good indicator that people were tired of the meaningless laws they had to obey in order to appease religious leaders; his message was like a fresh wind, offering life instead of bondage. This environment offered Jesus the perfect platform for calling others to be his followers.

When Elijah found Elisha, he was plowing the field; likewise, Jesus called his disciples from earthly tasks to follow him for an eternal task. Jesus' call was simple, "Follow me." The call implied more than just being part of the crowd listening to charismatic story-telling and witnessing miraculous signs, although many in the crowds did find healing and salvation that revolutionized their lives. No, Jesus' call to follow went much deeper, requiring the disciples to leave all, separate self from all that was familiar and safe, and enter a life of sacrifice and commitment to his service (Lk 14:26-27, 33). The call to follow was a call to full devotion to Christ alone. However, for his followers to become true disciples Jesus had to first teach them the way; therefore, the call meant to abide with Jesus. This is also significant in the Elder-at-the-Fire's relationship with the disciple.

Within Jesus' first year of ministry he had already entered the role of an Elder-at-the-Fire. Jesus brought to his eldership an amazing comprehension of the Jewish heritage and God's Law, but, more importantly, he brought his relationship with God, his Father, after which his ministry was modeled. Jesus not only knew God's Law; his life mirrored how that Law was to be lived out in a Christian's life. Jesus was the very representation of God to the disciples. He did only what his Father would have him do (Jn 5:19), thus setting an example for his disciples to obediently imitate (Lk 6:40, 1 Cor 11:1).

Jesus selected twelve men to be his inner circle. These men walked with Jesus; they ate with him, served him, watched him, listened to him, and had the privilege of Jesus' private counsel. Jesus invested his daily life into these men; unknown to them, these disciples became central figures of the missiogenepic story at a climactic time in history. More significantly, eleven of them accepted the call to go and make disciples of others.

As an Elder-at-the-Fire, Jesus not only imparted knowledge, but also shared life and heart wisdom for all areas of life. He taught them the importance of relationships, including how to love even the unlovable; he taught them how to play, mourn, worship, and pray. At times Jesus chastised his disciples, his patience perhaps running thin when the disciples were slow to understand. However, Jesus always chastised in love, encouraging and strengthening his disciples, while continuously teaching through example, expounding on the Word, performing miracles, and telling stories. Through his life he demonstrated how to live out the Gospel story and provided the disciples an example to follow in relating and communicating to others, which are still valuable methods for the Elder-at-the-Fire.

Jesus used parables in storytelling, offering up the mystery to be puzzled out. In private, Jesus' disciples often questioned Jesus regarding their meaning; as they were ready to understand, Jesus explained the mystery to them. He also made use of questions to draw the disciple into thinking for themselves or to drive home a point. Such was the question he asked Peter, "Do you love me?" (Jn 21:15-17). Jesus also used examples from nature and culture as metaphorical object lessons, sometimes referring to the messiness of life, at other times to its beauty, once again leading his listeners to think through the meaning of the lesson to uncover the truth for themselves.

Jesus also exemplified living the truth through his actions; he was not afraid to be seen among the prostitutes or eating bread with open sinners, yet in doing so he did not participate in sin with them (2 Cor 5:2, Heb 4:15, 1 Pet 2:22, 1 Jn 3:5). Jesus further demonstrated a servant's heart by lowering himself to perform the unpleasant task of washing the disciples' road-weary, dirty feet so they could recline at the table for a meal. This act revealed Jesus' humility and the type of service to which he calls his children. The disciples were appalled, so Jesus explained to them, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" (Jn 13:14-16). In demonstrating servanthood, Jesus provided a critical metaphor for the disciple—cleansing always comes before nourishment. However, this simple act taught a bigger lesson, to be fully part of Christ one must submit fully to his cleansing, no matter how humiliating it may be. To be a fully devoted follower, costly obedience and servant-heartedness are essential (Lk 14:27).

Jesus was more than a model for a specific leadership style. His goal was to make the disciples into replicas of himself, by incarnating himself within them, so that through their lives they might also incarnate God's Word. As an Elder-at-the-Fire, Jesus walked with the disciples with compassion, mercy, and grace, teaching them all he could within his short time on earth in order to prepare them to continue the work he was beginning.

An Elder-at-the-Fire always seeks to prepare others to carry on the role of Elder-at-the-Fire. Having gained heart wisdom through a life surrendered to God, and using lessons learned from trials and joys, the Elder-at-the-Fire imparts as much of this wisdom as possible to the disciple. Like Jesus, the Elder-at-the-Fire draws others to the Fire and helps them to discover how to call upon and live in God's presence and power.

Toward the end of his time on earth, Jesus began pulling away from public ministry and started investing more time with his disciples. Understanding that he would soon leave the earth, he intensified their training and challenged their devotion to him and understanding of who he was. He began questioning them about what others were saying about him, who they believed him to be, if they would stay with him while other followers were falling away, and then he challenged their devotion to him, "Do you love me?" (Mt 16: 13-16; Mk 8:27-29). During this time, he also began preparing them for the sufferings that awaited him and his death. As the opposition against him grew, Jesus demonstrated how to stand true for God in the face of adversity. This period of time was a time of testing and sifting to make sure his disciples would be able to carry the mantle, his cross.

Before departing earth, Jesus drew his disciples deeper into the mystery through a series of initiation rites into elderhood; all but one passed. He gave Peter a new name and

declared he would be the cornerstone of the Church (Mt 16:18). Jesus demonstrated servanthood by washing their feet (Jn 13:3-17). When the disciples met in the upper room for the Passover meal, Jesus shared with them a new sacrament of remembrance that they should keep and pass on to future generations (Mt 26:26-29, Jn 13:21-30). Jesus then gave his blessing to the disciples and promised he would send a comforter, the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26). After Jesus prayed, acknowledging to God that they had become mature disciples, he then commissioned them to carry on his work (Jn 17:6-19). Finally, from the cross, he appointed John to care for his mother (Jn 19:26).

What despair and confusion the disciples must have felt when Jesus was crucified. When Jesus called them to follow, none would have considered that the path would have led to this. However:

No life ends even for this world when the body by which it has for a little been made visible disappears from the face of the earth. It enters into the stream of the ever-swelling life of mankind, and continues to act there with its whole force for evermore. Indeed, the true magnitude of a human being can often only be measured by what this after-life shows him to have been. So it was with Christ. The modest narrative of the Gospels scarcely prepares us for the outburst of creative force which issued from his life when it appeared to have ended.⁶⁸

For three dark days the creative forces of Missional Generativity stirred and fermented until they could no longer contain themselves. Then, bursting forth from the grave, it forever made available its creative forces to those who would find the Way, the Truth, and the Life! While the disciples were mourning, Jesus was adding a life-transforming chapter to the missiogenepic story.

And yet, Jesus' role as Elder-at-the-Fire was not complete. So that the disciples could bear witness to his resurrection, Jesus returned to them for a period of forty days,

⁶⁸ James Stalker, *The Life of Jesus Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1949), 145.

walking and talking with them, catching fish, displaying his scars, teaching more lessons, and unlocking their minds to more fully understand the scriptures. Then Jesus commissioned them, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20a). However, one more rite of initiation was necessary before they were ready to be sent out; Jesus instructed them to wait in Jerusalem a few days to await that which he had promised (Acts 1:8) ... and then, the fire of the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

*Suddenly a sound like the blowing
of a violent wind came from heaven
and filled the whole house
where they were sitting.
They saw what seemed
to be tongues of fire
that separated and came
to rest on each of them.
All of them were filled
with the Holy Spirit.*

(Acts 2:2-4a)

A Call for Elders-at-the-Fire

Despite turbulent times, persecution, religious wars, and divisions, the church has persevered more than 2,000 years. In fact, in times of trial the church has generally experienced its greatest renewal and growth. When other institutions have failed under adversity, the church has prevailed. Adversity has been one of Christianity’s best friends. The turbulence and confusion of the Tesarac presents a perfect opportunity for Elders-at-the-Fire to rise from obscurity and reignite the Fire.

Each Tesarac requires a generation of new leaders that live a visible faith and incarnate the Word, leading others through the storm; that new leader is an Elder-at-the-Fire. The Elder-at-the-Fire will concentrate on persevering through the storm by faith—faith in the unknown and unseen; faith that God has already won the battle. Despite the storm, the Elder-at-the-Fire seeks the Spirit's presence, the Fire, and then moves forward with veriditas, a passion fueled with fire and energy that unleashes a counter-storm of life-giving creativity and restores vitality and life to the Church. The counter-storm holds the secret of the redemptive promise within the storm—the counter-storm of the missiogenepic story of the cross.

By Christ's power and presence, the Elder-at-the-Fire may disciple many people, but unfortunately not all will take up the mantle or stay a true course. Many Jews of Jesus' day did not comprehend Jesus' meaning when he talked about them being slaves to sin. They thought that as Abraham's descendants they were already free. So too, many who have grown up in modern-day Christianity, those who live on the coattails of Christian parents or leaders, or who live by learned standards of Christian morals, believe they automatically have an eternal inheritance. However, Jesus said that those who do not hold to his teaching cannot be his disciple (Jn 8:31). As men and women of free will, even those who have spent much of their lives in church or being disciplined can fall prey to Satan's lure of greed, recognition, or power. Elisha, even with the double portion of the Spirit, was unable to prevent Gehazi from acting upon the seed of greed Satan placed in his heart (2 Kgs 5:20-27). Likewise, Judas Iscariot gave in to temptation, betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Rather than request a double portion of the Spirit, the greed of these men became their inheritance.

Sin's de-generativity has rash consequences for the sinner. This is the epic struggle in the missiogenepic story: Satan works overtime to divert Christian leaders away from a godly walk. The Tesarac with its volatile and rapid change has further disoriented Christians away from God's Truth. For this reason, Elders-at-the-Fire are more necessary than ever. Elders-at-the-Fire offer the missiogenepic story, which contains the only salvation from de-generativity, a salvation made manifest in Missional Generativity. This story, augmented with the Elder's long-earned wisdom, is the guiding light in changing times which helps find the bedrock truth for navigating into the future.

The Church needs leaders to emerge as agents of Missional Generativity to be the catalysts that help produce more fully devoted disciples of Christ. More Christians need to pick up Christ's mantle and shout out for God's fire to fall on the altar of their heart, and stir to life the flames of passion for his people: the flames of Missional Generativity. The Church needs men and women to take up the calling, enter the pilgrimage, and accept the anointing of Elder-at-the-Fire and, in so doing, pass the torch to generations yet unborn.

*So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets,
the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,
to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ
may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith
and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,
attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants,
tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there
by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and
craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.*

*Instead, speaking the truth in love,
we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him
who is the head, that is, Christ.
From him the whole body, joined and held together*

*by every supporting ligament, grows
and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Eph 4:11-16

SECTION IV: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The artifact is a non-fiction book proposal entitled *Elder-at-the-Fire: Pilgrimage to Missional Generativity*. The book addresses the problem of stagnancy the Church encounters when her ability to generatively reproduce has been stunted due to the chaotic cultural storms. These storms have rearranged the leadership landscape and obscured the way to effectively disciple others to a life of spiritual maturity. This book offers a new model of Christian leader, Elder-at-the Fire, the needed catalyst for implementing Missional Generativity to apprentice others to wholeness and maturity in Christ.

The book takes an andragogic approach with a goal of transformative learning. Andragogy is a term used to define an adult learning model that is differentiated from pedagogy (teaching children). Rather than directed learning, Andragogy is self-directed and encourages the learner to contextualize learning within their environment and life experiences. A benefit of the andragogic approach is that the learner is self-motivated in their own learning outcomes, and is thereby more readily able to comprehend, order, and integrate meaning with what they know.¹ The committed learner becomes “critically aware of one’s own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation,” thus enabling them to make meaning and transfer that meaning to others, and in so doing is able “to avoid the threat of chaos.”² This approach is significant for the journey to Missional Generativity and the development of an Elder-at-the-Fire.

¹ Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents, n.d.), 40-58, accessed October 15, 2015, http://www.hospitalist.cumc.columbia.edu/downloads/cc4_articles/Education%20Theory/Andragogy.pdf.

² Jack Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3-4.

Written in an informal instructional format with practical reflective applications, the book helps the reader to discover their personal path to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. The book is intended to be used as a pilgrimage-guide to assist the reader in understanding the need for and role of an Elder-at-the-Fire, as well as the importance of integrating Missional Generativity into their life and mission in order to bring others to wholeness.

The book's Introduction will narrate the author's personal journey that led to writing this book and then introduce the need for a new model of Christian leadership, Elder-at-the-Fire, and the special role Elders play when they become authentic agents of Missional Generativity through the power of the Spirit. The Introduction will also provide a brief synopsis of the book's purpose, format, and content.

The body of the book will be divided into three parts: Part I, *Fanning the Embers*, will explore the intrinsic need for Christians to leave a generative spiritual legacy and how this need may be met through the role of Elder-at-the-Fire. Biblical examples will help portray the path and purpose of the Elder-at-the-Fire, including a study of Elijah's path to becoming an Elder to Elisha, and Jesus' relationship with his disciples. Part II, *Finding the Fire*, defines generativity, explains Missional Generativity as an essential characteristic for an Elder-at-the-Fire, and explores missiogenepic as the overarching narrative the Elder-at-the-Fire participates in and draws others deeper into. Part III, *Feeding the Fire*, invites the reader on an epic adventure, a pilgrimage to Missional Generativity and becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. A discussion of pilgrimage practices will set the stage for how to journey through the pilgrimage. The final chapter in this part will emphasize various aspects of pilgrimage and use scripture, thought-provoking questions,

and activities that guide the reader toward reflections and actions to incorporate in his or her life on the pathway for becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire.

The book's conclusion, *Fire Dance*, challenges and encourages the reader to continue in their journey, ultimately transferring that role of Elder-at-the-Fire to future generations.

The book, particularly Part III, invites the reader into deep, personal self-reflection and growth. The book should be read with a spirit of prayer and open heart and ears listening for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

SECTION V: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Dear Editor:

I am presenting for your consideration a proposal for a non-fiction book, *Elder-at-the-Fire: Pilgrimage to Missional Generativity*.

Pastors and church leaders share a common concern about the struggle to create and sustain a discipleship culture. The problem stems from a lack of wisdom leaders to guide the way. In ancient tribal communities, an elder was recognized and sought out as a person of great wisdom for guiding the tribe. This book introduces Elder-at-the-Fire as a spiritual wisdom guide to apprentice others to Christian maturity and wholeness.

In a society lacking spiritual elders, how does one become an Elder-at-the-Fire? This book targets mature Christians and church leaders who have a desire to pass on a spiritual legacy. The book invites the reader into deep spiritual reflection and challenges them to embark upon a personal pilgrimage to Missional Generativity, the essential characteristic to being an Elder-at-the-Fire. The Elder-at-the-Fire relationally invests long-term in the lives of others and helps navigate them through the chaos of a changing world, ultimately guiding them to take up the mantle of being an Elder-at-the-Fire for future generations.

I have diverse life and leadership experiences both in ministry and state government, along with more than twenty years' ministry as a pastor's wife. I have had many opportunities to work with others, providing both personal and spiritual guidance and counsel. It has been my joy to watch them grow and pick up their own mantle. I have a master's degree in Christian Education and am a Doctoral Ministry candidate in George Fox Seminary's Leadership in the Emerging Culture program.

I appreciate your time and consideration of *Elder-at-the-Fire: Pilgrimage to Missional Generativity* and welcome your feedback.

Sincerely,

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Nonfiction Book Proposal

Title: Elder-at-the-Fire: Pilgrimage to Missional Generativity

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Hook: In ancient biblical times and in many tribal communities, the role of elder was a revered role of one who was recognized and sought out as a person of great wisdom. This book introduces the reader to a new type of elder, Elder-at-the-Fire, who apprentices others to a life of Missional Generativity.

Overview: Societies and cultures are changing at an unprecedented pace; this chaotic time of uncertainty has disrupted the Church's ability to advance God's kingdom and nurture fully mature disciples of Christ. Pastors and other Christian leaders are seeking new means and methods to address this concern. This book introduces the role of Elder-at-the-Fire as a new type of leader essential to meeting this crisis. By investing in the lives of others and transmitting wisdom borne through life experiences, the Elder-at-the-Fire navigates others through the chaos to help them learn to live and minister in a way that is both missional and generative. The Elder then extends the Elder model to help build a discipling ethos. This book is not intended to be a program; rather, it offers a pilgrimage path to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire.

Purpose:

- Address the concern of developing and replicating mature disciples
- Present the leadership model of Elder-at-the-Fire
- Provide biblical examples to support the Elder-at-the-Fire role in guiding others to spiritual maturity
- Describe Missional Generativity as an essential element required for the spiritual Elder
- Provide a pilgrimage model as the pathway to developing as an Elder-at-the-Fire

Promotion and Marketing:

Pastors, church leaders, and Christian authors recognize and share their concern for the dilemma of effective discipleship. This crisis is also recognized and documented by Gallup, Barna Research, and other survey studies, as a critical problem the Church must address. This book offers a new type of Christian Leader whose role is to serve in the

capacity of an Elder to mentor, guide, and apprentice others to a life of Missional Generativity.

The book can be easily promoted through social media venues such as Facebook, Google Plus, LinkedIn, and Twitter; through personal contact with local churches, Christian colleges, seminaries, and church consultants; on various websites and blogs, including the author's future websites, www.missionalgenerativity.com and www.generativefire.com; through Christian publications such as magazines, newsletters, and newspapers; networking with key influencers; and through direct email notifications.

Competition:

- *Elder, A Spiritual Alternative to Being Elderly*, by Terry Jones, Elderhood Institute Books, 2010. This book is written for older people and provides an alternative to simply being elderly by outlining the role of elderhood as the wisdom keepers, earthkeepers, and mentors to younger generations and is approached from the perspective of development in late life that leads to a more productive life.
- *Multiplying Missional Leaders: From Half-hearted Volunteers to a Mobilized Kingdom Force*, by Mike Breen, 3DM Publishing, 2014. The author addresses the issue of programs that are intended to train and develop new leaders, but in reality only duplicate a volunteer mentality. This book offers the solution of developing and multiplying missional leaders to create a discipleship culture.
- *Untamed: Reactivating a Missional Form of Discipleship*, by Alan and Debra Hirsh, Baker Books, 2010. Written from an apostolic or missional framework, this book is written to inspire disciples of Jesus to grow deeper in Christ, despite the costs, in order to create a discipleship movement that can change the Church and the world.

Uniqueness:

The book, *Elder*, recognizes the need for spiritual elders; however, its focus is geared more toward helping the older person feeling more useful and fulfilled rather than for the purpose of creating new elders. The other two books focus on developing missional leaders who can help generate a discipling culture; however, none of the above books focus on the specific role or purpose that makes an Elder-at-the-Fire unique, the long-term relational interaction through Missional Generativity.

Endorsements:

Dr. Leonard Sweet, Dr. Kent Hunter, and Dr. John O'Keefe have agreed to write endorsements.

Book Format:

The book is written in an informal instructional format interwoven with narrative and inspirational quotes. Chapters 1-5 also provide *Fire Starters*—practical application exercises for the reader. Chapter 7 has a unique format; the intent of this chapter is to serve

as a pilgrimage guide as the reader embarks on and progresses through their personal journey.

Chapter Outline:

- *Introduction:* Briefly describes the author's personal journey that led to writing the book. Establishes the need for a new model of leadership, Elder-at-the-Fire (EAF), and provides a brief synopsis of the book's purpose, format, and content.
- Part I – *Fanning the Embers*
 - *Chapter 1: Light my Fire!* The purpose of this chapter is to explore the intrinsic need for the Christian to leave a generative spiritual legacy and how this need may be met through becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. It also discusses what it means to be called to the role of Elder-at-the-Fire.
 - *Chapter 2: Generating a Living Fire.* This chapter introduces Elijah's role with Elisha and Jesus' role with his disciples as examples of the effectiveness of the EAF/apprentice relationship, and challenges the reader to follow in these examples.
- Part II – *Finding the Fire*
 - *Chapter 3: Fire of Missional Generativity.* This chapter defines generativity and describes Missional Generativity as an essential element in the Elder-at-the-Fire's spiritual life and for discipling others.
 - *Chapter 4: Sustaining Fire.* In this chapter the concepts of Elder-at-the-Fire and Missional Generativity will be combined and explored more fully, introducing the term *missiogenepic*.
 - *Chapter 5: Gathered at the Fire.* Building on the previous chapters, this chapter further develops the importance of missiogenepic as the overarching missiogenepic narrative the Elder-at-the-Fire participates in and draws others deeper into.
- Part III – *Feeding the Fire*
 - *Chapter 6: Challenge to an Epic Adventure.* This chapter describes pilgrimage as the pathway to Missional Generativity and discusses various aspects of a pilgrimage that will assist the reader in further understanding the journey and commitment to being an Elder-at-the-Fire.
 - *Chapter 7: Pilgrimage to Missional Generativity.* The format of this chapter is presented as a journey that interweaves activities with specific

practices of a pilgrimage for the purpose of helping the reader along their pathway to Missional Generativity and being an Elder-at-the-Fire.

- Conclusion – *Fire Dance*
 - Chapter 8: *Passing on the Fire*. The concluding chapter challenges the reader to continue in the journey to being an Elder-at-the-Fire and passing the Elder-at-the-Fire mantle to future generations.

Intended Readers:

- Primary Audience:
 - Mature Christians who have a desire to pass forward a spiritual legacy
 - Pastors and other church leaders
- Secondary Audience:
 - Christian college and Seminary professors
 - Seminary students

Manuscript: The Introduction, Chapters 1-3, and Chapter 6 are complete. The book will be approximately 45,000 words. Four months will be needed to complete the manuscript.

Author Bio:

Jo Harlow is a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) candidate in *Leadership in the Emerging Culture* program at George Fox Seminary, and holds a Bachelor's degree in Church Music from Warner Pacific College and a Master's degree in Christian Education through Western Evangelical Seminary. Jo has more than 30 years' leadership experience developing and leading volunteer teams in Christian education, worship, music, and missions at the local church and conference levels across five denominations, and encompassing multi-cultural congregations. She participated as a team member providing Christian education training to churches in Oregon and Washington, and independently developed and led Christian education training programs and seminars in California, Nevada, and Texas. As a pastor's wife for more than 20 years, Jo co-planted a church and provided many years of counsel to parishioners.

In addition to Jo's ministry experience, she has extensive leadership experience in California state government where she led multidisciplinary teams, as well as had leadership roles in and through large mission bureaucracies. She developed statewide training programs and/or curricula in supervision, leadership development, and effective facilitation. She has conducted training and delivered numerous presentations at departmental workshops and labor union meetings. Further, she has provided oversight to large, politically sensitive projects.

Jo's experience in ministry and secular employment have given her years of experience in dealing with people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds, and provided her opportunities to live out her passion of mentoring others to uncover their personal gifts, abilities, and passion.

Publishing Credits: None.

Future Projects:

Elder-at-the-Fire: Reflections on the Journey. This book will be an accompaniment to the book *Elder-at-the-Fire: Pilgrimage to Missional Generativity* and serve as a motivational resource for journaling the pilgrimage process.

Elder-at-the-Fire Immersion. This book will serve as curriculum for use in an Elder-directed immersion experience in an Advance setting.

Generative Fire: Living a Life of Missional Generativity. This book will further explore Missional Generativity and lead the reader into discovering their inner God-given passions and how they are essential to the body of Christ and Kingdom building.

SECTION VI: POSTSCRIPT

Upon entering the *Leadership in the Emerging Culture* program, my objective was to develop a new model for church consulting. My concern was that current models focused mainly on increasing numbers rather than generatively increasing the Kingdom of God outside the walls of the church. Initially my thesis centered on establishing a consulting module that identified abusive structures the church unwittingly erects that prevent organic church growth. The concept of generativity as a solution to this ministry problem was forefront in my studies. However, during the course of my studies, this direction shifted to a focus that I felt was the underlying problem, a lack of fully matured Christians, and, further, a lack of leaders to invest in long-term master-apprentice relationships.

In writing my first essay, I stumbled across a book, *Claiming Your Place at the Fire: Living the Second Half of your Life on Purpose*. In this book, a Hadza tribal elder inquired of the author, “Who are your elders?” This question resonated with me; not only did the author not have an answer, but neither could I answer for the Church. Thus evolved the metaphor, *Elder-at-the-Fire*. The broader question then became, how does one become an Elder-at-the-Fire if there are few or no wisdom guides to lead the way, and, what is the pathway they must trod to become an Elder-at-the-Fire? I struggled over this question, thinking way too hard rather than listening; eventually, after I quieted my spirit, I heard a still small voice whisper, *Missional Generativity*.

With my direction clarified, I began determining the various avenues I would need to explore in order to bring my concept together. After presenting a potential bibliography to Dr. Steve Delamarter, he commented that my selection was too diverse

and broad, but then he shook his head and exclaimed that all of it was necessary. He was right; it was broad, yet essential in order to bring the concept into fruition. Further, I firmly believed this path was God's route, not my own, and obedience to his direction was more important than finding an easier trail.

Early in the process of determining how to describe the road to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire, a good friend made the comment that perhaps the process would parallel my personal journey. Her words turned out prophetic. Although I began making good progress on the Written Statement, very quickly the trials and hardships of life provided stumbling blocks. Additionally, my work responsibilities increased, adding additional stress and long hours, wearing me out physically, mentally, and emotionally—becoming wilderness experiences. The constant fluxes in my life affected my ability to have constancy or continuity in writing, at times having to completely stop writing as life's detours took me off the path. Intermittently, I would have a respite and return to my dissertation excited to move forward, only to be waylaid once again by life's challenges. Despite the many starts and stops, I constantly made notes or mulled over the pilgrimage process essential to developing as an Elder-at-the-Fire.

In writing the dissertation, I focused first on the Written Statement, while simultaneously outlining the Artifact and making notes, many of which pertained to both. I also incorporated pieces of my previous essays from the DMIN coursework. Throughout the process, I frequently returned to the initial description of how I planned to approach both the Written Statement and the Artifact to ensure consistency in content. Because of my numerous starts and stops, this practice became vitally important to keep me on track.

Through my research and development of the Written Statement and Artifact, and in formulating the concept of Missional Generativity, I become conscious of its importance, not only to my thesis, but also to the overall mission of Jesus and the Church. The study of Elijah's pilgrimage in comparison to Jesus' ministry resulted in transparency and understanding of my own personal journey and the struggles and triumphs that affected me as I have matured in Christ, including my understanding of his calling on my life. My hope is that others will capture the essence of Missional Generativity and desire to incorporate it into their own lives as they strive toward maturity in Christ, whether or not they feel the calling to become an Elder-at-the-Fire.

The Artifact presented with this Written Statement contains the Introduction, Chapters 1-3, and Chapter 6. Since much of the content in Chapters 1-5 are similar to or mirror content in the Written Statement, I chose to skip Chapters 4-5 and include the 6th chapter instead in order to give readers of this dissertation a clearer picture of the purpose of pilgrimage to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire.

Post-doctoral work will include completion of the intervening and concluding chapters, as well as further development of Chapter 7, which serves as the actual pilgrimage experience. This chapter will be written to mimic a pilgrimage, including pilgrim practices (activities, contemplative reflections, etc.) that require the reader to examine their life in respect to their journey toward Missional Generativity and their calling to Elder-at-the-Fire. This portion may necessitate further studies in pilgrim practices, as well as brainstorming creative ways to present the information. I would also like to expand on my studies of generativity in order to further develop the concepts of Missional Generativity and the missiogenepic narrative.

There are varied potential outcomes resulting from this project. Initially, my intent is to find an agent to assist in publishing the book. Another avenue I am considering is the possibility of teaching in higher education or through seminars and workshops; to this end I plan to write curricula and am also considering the development of a series of online eLearning modules. I further want to expand on the Elder-at-the-Fire pilgrimage experience by creating a pilgrimage journal, and ultimately create an online journey experience where fellow Elder-at-the-Fire pilgrims can interact. Finally, I'd like to write a follow-up book on Missional Generativity as it applies to all aspects of the Christian's life.

APPENDIX 1: ARTIFACT

ELDER-AT-THE-FIRE:

PILGRIMAGE TO MISSIONAL GENERATIVITY

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INTRODUCTION

At thirteen, I first recognized the need for Elders-at-the-Fire. It always seemed strange to me that I should recall this instance so distinctly. It was a sunny day as I walked into our kitchen and the thought struck me that the church needed Elders-at-the-Fire. Okay, it wasn't quite like that; I did not have a name for them at the time, but I sensed a need not just for me personally, but for others.

I was raised in a Christian home with parents who were actively involved in the ministry of the church. At the time my father was the Minister of Music at a thriving local church in which our family's life was centered. We used to say that we were there whenever the doors were open, but in truth we were often there even when they were not! I had given my life to God at the altar in this church when I was nine years old. My parents were thrilled and encouraged me to have devotions and read the Bible daily. Sunday dinners often included guests in our home, or we were invited into theirs. The conversation around the dinner table usually included a further discussion of the pastor's sermon. I learned a lot as a child, but still felt something was missing. This particular day was an ordinary day, but as I walked into the kitchen and looked at my family gathered around the table, it was as if I were suddenly struck by lightning and the thought came to me, "I really need someone to disciple me. Why doesn't the church have people dedicated to investing their lives in discipling others?" The thought was likely not quite that sophisticated, but it has remained with me for years whereas other memories slipped away.

Little did I know this was God's first prompting of an inbred passion that one day would burn deep within my heart; a passion which has since been kindled and refined

beyond the idea that we need those who can disciple others. Of course we need them, too, but what I now imagine is a need for key individuals to be Elders-at-the-Fire, to be torch bearers to others, lighting the path to true discipleship—not just a catchy phrase or a ten-week program, but a lifestyle that brings others into a place of maturity and knowing the heart and mind of Christ.

It may seem random that I should have had this experience upon walking into a kitchen, yet the metaphors are not lost on me. Nothing in God’s plan is random—even place, time, and the in-between spaces of events hold meaning in his design for our lives. He wants us to step into his mystery and seek the meaning there. As I look back over my life, the kitchen has been central—in satiating hunger, providing nourishment, sharing meals with others, learning, earning a living, comfort, warmth, and many more things.

I recall standing on a chair in my grandmother’s kitchen as she taught me how to make toast. As a five-year-old, I felt very important learning how to transform a piece of bread! When I was seven, my mother taught me to use a potato peeler; once again I felt a sense of importance and accomplishment—now I could help feed the family. I confess that using a potato peeler no longer holds the same sense of wonder or joy as it did when I first used to learn it, especially in a day and age in which I have grown used to instant conveniences. Along with my grandmother, mother, sisters, aunts, and cousins, I learned the age-old art of canning. The messiness of preparing vegetables and fruit for preservation was outweighed by the fellowship and communion of a family working together while sharing stories; I particularly loved the stories my grandmother told of times past and the struggles and triumphs of her life.

As a teenager, the task of cooking dinner for our family of eight fell to me. After a long walk home from school I called my mother at work to receive instructions on what to cook for dinner and how to cook it. Mostly I learned in the oral tradition of “about a handful of this, a dash of that, and pour in a little bit—whatever looks good to you!” On one occasion my mother instructed me to make scalloped potatoes. I was excited as this was my first time to cook one of my favorites. The potatoes were perfectly browned and as I placed the bubbling dish on the table, you could almost see everyone drooling, but as each member of the family took a bite they quickly spit it out! My mother had told me to put a layer of flour between each layer of potatoes. I did! However, her idea of a layer was to sprinkle the flour lightly while mine was to make sure no potatoes could be seen beneath the layer!

The metaphor of a kitchen, then, is very appropriate. The care and feeding of others is something Jesus cared about as well and was an important part of his life; in fact, the beginning of his ministry was marked by turning water into wine. I’d like his recipe for multiplying fish and bread—it would come in handy when unexpected guests show up! One of the last things Jesus did upon this earth was to break bread with his disciples—a metaphor they did not understand at the time—a tradition passed down and celebrated to this day, in remembrance of him (Lk 22:14-20). Jesus’ Last Supper is one of great significance to the believer and to his commission to “go into the world and make disciples” (Mt 28:19).

That God gestated the idea for Elders-at-the-Fire in my heart in a kitchen now makes total sense. It is completely relevant to the calling he has placed on my life to

pursue the path of being an Elder-at-the-Fire, a path that has become a pilgrimage for me and one to which I invite the reader.

In writing this, it occurred to me that my age might hold significance as well. I was thirteen years old when I had the experience that day in the kitchen, on the cusp of entering womanhood, in the progress of leaving childish things behind. Is this not what should occur in the Christian's life? As we mature in Christ, we leave behind childish things, wean ourselves from milk, and eat solid food (1 Cor 13:10-12, Heb 5:12-14). At the age of thirteen, God stirred my heart and whispered into my consciousness the need for leaders who would feed and nurture others as they grew to maturity in Christ and, like my grandmother and mother taught me in the kitchen, to pass on the traditions, wisdom, recipes, and stories to future generations.

The concept of Elder-at-the-Fire is comprised of two main components which work together synergistically. The first is the aspect of Elder. Like many teenagers and young adults, I went through a phase where I thought I knew it all. While attending Bible College I was surrounded by students, faculty, and staff engaged in Bible study, fellowship, and spiritual nurturing as part of the educational process. The need for Elders, generally, was not in the forefront of my thoughts. However, as life's disappointments, heartbreaks, and struggles came along, I often wished for an Elder-type person in my life to not only disciple me, but to also help me navigate through tough seasons and in making good decisions.

Later, in my late twenties as a ministry partner to my spouse, I discovered that I was set apart; I was viewed by many in the congregation as having all the answers, having already "arrived," so to speak. Even seasoned pastors' wives counseled me to be

careful to not make close friends within the church as this could lead to jealousies and ultimately be detrimental to the ministry. I was essentially placed on a pedestal, but along with the pedestal came loneliness. I found myself in a place to provide guidance, wisdom, counseling, and discipleship to others, but few to play that role for me and none willing to invest long-term in such a relationship. As I looked at other young or new ministry families, I witnessed the same problem. This was especially difficult for those in decentralized ministries. On one occasion at a pastor's wives retreat, a middle-aged woman whose husband had recently changed from secular employment to being a pastor asked the women at the retreat for sage spiritual advice. I was shocked at the pat responses she received to a genuine cry for help, but more shocked as the women rushed to town for a shopping spree rather than disciple her. Even though I was about twelve years younger than this woman, I made the effort to talk with her and tried to impart some wisdom; however, I felt very incompetent. Once again, this brought to mind the need for spiritual Elders to devote their time and wisdom to guiding other Christians to maturity in Christ.

Over the years I have visited with many pastors and church leaders from various churches, sometimes as a friend, other times as an invited guest, and in some cases as a consultant. The most frequent issue I heard repeated was the problem of developing Christians to becoming fully devoted and mature disciples of Christ. I can still see the look of confusion and hear the defeat as one pastor friend told me, "I just don't know what to do. I'm doing everything right, everything we're supposed to do, everything I was taught to do, yet it seems Christians simply are not maturing in Christ."

While on vacation a few years back, I dropped in to attend services at the church I had attended as a young adult; most of my friends had moved on, but a few were still there. One couple invited me into their home, and as we ate and caught up on our lives they began sharing their frustrations with the church. As young adults we were part of a very vibrant college/career group; many of us had aspirations to become involved in fulltime ministry or to serve in the local ministry of the church. This couple (although not their real names, I'll call them Jared and Carrie), explained that they felt they were no longer needed. Jared especially lamented, "We are at the age when we thought we would be taking over many of the leadership positions. As the ones who lead us have grown older and retired, it seemed only natural that we should take their place. However, the emphasis of our pastor is to bring younger blood into leadership for fresh ideas. I now find myself in a place where I'm too young to retire, but I am pushed out of the positions I would have filled and brought some knowledge and experience. Don't they want my wisdom?" I was saddened by this situation, yet it came at a time when I was beginning to think of transitions in my own life and once again recognized the need which God had made me aware of many years before. This experience helped set in motion that burning passion God stirred in my heart at age thirteen.

A short time later I entered a Doctor of Ministry program, *Leadership in the Emerging Culture*, at George Fox Seminary in Portland, Oregon. Upon entering the program I prayed that God would direct my educational experience. I wanted it to be more than an education. I wanted to gain more knowledge, but more importantly, I wanted to transfer my knowledge and experiences into wisdom. While in the first semester of this program I happened to read a book by Richard Leider, *Claiming your*

Place at the Fire. This book is written for those who are emerging from middle-age into their senior years and who want to live their life with purpose. Although not a book written for the Church, it pointed out an issue prevalent in our society—the lack of wisdom elders. Leider tells the story of visiting an indigenous Tanzanian tribal community, the Hadza tribe. As a guest he was invited to sit among the elders around the fire as they related stories and wisdom passed down through generations. Leider and his team were fascinated as they listened to the wisdom narratives of the tribal leaders. After one such story, a tribal elder turned to Leider and asked, “Who are the elders of your tribe?”¹ He had no answer, and thus began his journey to discover what an elder would look like in our society. As I read this portion of the book, I modified the question. “Who and where are the elders of the Church?”

The second component of Elders-at-the-Fire is, of course, *Fire*. This key component is what I long ago sensed was missing. Yes, fire can metaphorically represent Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, and God the Father, and it does, but it is also more than that. Primitive tribal elders gather people around fires and *create an atmosphere where learning is able to take place*. Through their character, wisdom, and meaningful stories around the central fire, they transfer their deep knowledge, wisdom, and culture in a meaningful, life-changing way to subsequent generations, instilling the principles needed to face an uncertain future. I sensed that this was the missing component in our local churches and denominations. I saw that our leaders were adept at putting in place programs, often trying to mimic someone else’s success, but were ill-equipped to create truly life-changing discipleship environments. Thus began my journey to define the need

¹ Richard Leider and David A. Shapiro, *Claiming Your Place at the Fire: Living the Second Half of Your Life On Purpose* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2004), ix-xi.

for a new type of Christian leader, one who could help bring people into a deep maturity in Christ—the Elder-at-the-Fire.

As my studies progressed I also began studying generativity and its importance in furthering and maturing God’s kingdom. Generativity, simply defined, is a legacy by which a person invests “in forms of life and work that outlive the self.”² In reality it is more complex and illusive than this simple definition, and will be discussed in more depth in Part II of this book; however, it is vital not only to bringing others to Christ, but also in discipling others to maturity. I knew this must be part of the Elder-at-the-Fire, but felt I was still missing a piece. I spent many hours, days, and months ruminating on what was missing, and grew very frustrated that I could not figure it out. While out for a walk one evening I had a conversation with God, expressing my frustration. I griped, complained, railed, and moaned, until I finally prayed, “God, I just cannot figure it out. You’re going to have to give it to me!” At that point I decided to just enjoy nature as I walked, and wait patiently for God’s. Not more than a few steps later, two words entered my mind, *Missional Generativity*. I knew these words were from God and the key essential to being an Elder-at-the-Fire.

In a society lacking spiritual elders, how does one become an Elder-at-the-Fire? This book is written for mature Christians, pastors, and church leaders who have a desire to invest in others’ lives for the purpose of passing on a spiritual legacy. It invites the reader into deep spiritual reflection and challenges them to embark upon a personal pilgrimage to Missional Generativity—accomplishing God’s mission through generative means that will provide a legacy for the future—an essential characteristic to being an

² John Kotre, *Outliving the Self: Generativity and the Interpretation of Lives* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 10.

Elder-at-the-Fire. The Elder-at-the-Fire relationally invests long-term in the lives of others and helps navigate them through the chaos of a changing world, ultimately guiding them to take up the mantle of being an Elder-at-the-Fire for future generations.

The purpose of this book is to address the problem of stagnancy the Church encounters when her ability to generatively reproduce has been stunted due to the chaotic societal and cultural storms that have rearranged the leadership landscape and obscured the way to effectively disciple others to a life of spiritual maturity. To meet this need, I suggest a new model of Christian leader, Elder-at-the Fire, the needed catalyst for implementing Missional Generativity and apprenticing others to wholeness and maturity in Christ.

The body of the book is divided into three main parts: Part I, *Fanning the Embers*, will explore the intrinsic need for Christians to leave a generative spiritual legacy and how this need may be met through the role of Elder-at-the-Fire. Biblical examples will help portray the path and purpose of the Elder-at-the-Fire, including a study of Elijah as an Elder to Elisha and Jesus' relationship with his disciples. Part II, *Finding the Fire*, defines generativity, explains Missional Generativity as an essential characteristic for an Elder-at-the-Fire, and explores missiogenepic as the overarching narrative the Elder-at-the-Fire participates in and draws others deeper into. The end of each of the above chapters will feature *Fire Starters*, suggested activities and reflections for the reader to engage with to assimilate the content.

Part III, *Feeding the Fire*, invites the reader on an epic adventure, a pilgrimage to Missional Generativity and becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. A discussion of pilgrimage practices will set the stage for how to journey through the pilgrimage. The final chapter in

this part will emphasize various aspects of pilgrimage and use scripture, thought provoking questions, and activities that guide the reader toward reflections and actions to incorporate into his or her life on the pathway to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. The book will conclude with the chapter *Fire Dance*, which challenges and encourages the reader to continue in their journey toward being an Elder-at-the-Fire, and ultimately transferring that role to future generations.

This book is not intended to be self-help book; it is intended to be read in prayerful relationship with the author and designer of Life, seeking his guidance. The book's intent is to serve as a prompt for contemplative, prayerful reflection in seeking *God-help*. This book is not intended to be read through all at once, but to use as an introspective pilgrimage guide to prompt your heart to respond to the calling of Elder-at-the-Fire and a life exemplified by Missional Generativity. It invites the reader to engage in deep, personal self-reflection and growth, bathed in prayer, and with open heart and ears listening for the Holy Spirit's guidance and blessing.

If you are a pastor or church leader, I invite you, as you read this book, to contemplate how you might develop an Elder-at-the-Fire culture within your church body.

As you go through this book you will encounter some new ideas about the role and function of an Elder-at-the-Fire. You may find yourself asking, "How do I identify an Elder-at-the-Fire and how can I develop an Elder-at-the-Fire culture within the church body?" Keep in mind that this role is neither a governance position of elder nor an official position in the church; it is also not a program. Elder-at-the-Fire is a calling and a lifestyle, therefore you cannot "select" individuals to fill this role; it must develop

organically. However, as a pastor or leader you may be the prompt that awakens the calling in another's life. To help you begin to understand how you might develop an Elder-at-the-Fire culture within your church body, there are several things you will want to consider:

Begin thinking in terms of people within your church body who seem to fit the description of or have potential for becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire as presented in this book. Who are those who have natural influence in relationships? Who are those who spend time investing in others' lives—not in “doing” things for others, but in “being” Jesus to others? Who are those whom others seek out for advice or life-wisdom? Who are those who promote and live missionally generative lives (pay special attention to chapters 3-5)? Do not rush off and ask someone to be an Elder-at-the-Fire or put out a call for volunteers; observe them, pay attention, and most importantly, pray for God's leading before approaching them with this new concept. There may be a few within your congregation who are already an Elder-at-the-Fire, but they do not know it; others may sense a calling but not know how to fulfill it, and some need prompting or are not yet ready. The key is to allow God to direct you as he works in the hearts and lives of prospective Elders-at-the-Fire.

Secondly, identify the cultural architects within your church—individuals who can see the bigger picture, are able to motivate others for change, are adept at reading culture and sub-culture, have the capacity to creatively vision, and most importantly, have the ability to influence others. These are the individuals you will want to enter into dialogue with to begin discussing the need for and how to develop an Elder-at-the-Fire culture.

Initiate casual conversations about the need for Elders-at-the-Fire, and then listen, listen, listen! In addition to identifying potential Elders-at-the-Fire and cultural architects, it is vital to hear the voice of the people with the church body. This will help identify who may be receptive to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire or being apprenticed by one, and shed light on the scope of the need. You may also find that you need to rethink the way you do church, or your pre-conceptions of the congregational needs.

Pay special attention to the *Fire Starters* section at the end of chapters 1-5. Each section will include activities specifically designed to assist pastors and church leaders to explore the concept of integrating an Elder-at-the-Fire culture within your church.

The pathway to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire is a pilgrimage: a slow, winding, arduous journey. The pilgrimage also includes places for the sojourner to take respite from the journey, to assess the landscape and acquire the inner sustenance necessary for this sacred sojourn. You are not on the journey alone, for God has given us an example of the greatest Elder and sent his Holy Spirit to be our guide.

PART I

FANNING THE EMBERS

*We do, however, speak a message
of wisdom among the mature,
but not the wisdom of this age
or of the rulers of this age,
who are coming to nothing.
No, we declare God's wisdom,
a mystery that has been hidden
and that God destined for our glory
before time began.*

—1 Cor 2:6-7

Chapter 1

Light My Fire!

*We need to be on fire again,
for our hope is no longer an easy one.
We live in a culture of despair within which Pentecost
can no longer be taken for granted.
Hence we must take upon ourselves
the burden of the times
and refuse to make the Holy Spirit
a piece of private property,
but a Spirit that matters ...
The road is not clear but we must
make our way by walking.*

—Mary Jo Leddy¹

My grandmother was often referred to as a “saint.” That was not grandma’s definition of herself, and she was quick to point out instances in her life to provide evidence that she was not. For many years she kept a diary, and sometimes would refer to it as proof that she often had thoughts or did things that were not saint-like! There were several times in her earlier diaries that I found references to her being mad at the preacher! When I asked her why she was mad, sometimes she could not remember, but other times she would smile and tell me the story about their disagreement and how it was ironed out. She rarely wrote anything in detail; her diaries sat on a side table in the living room, available for anyone to read. In order to avoid damaging anyone’s character, she was purposely vague at times, as she put it, “to protect the innocent and not so innocent!” However, regardless of her human feelings, thoughts, and actions that she

¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 42.

deemed inappropriate, others respected her and held her in very high regard. Grandma was greatly sought out by others—friends, family, neighbors, church members—as a person of wisdom and godly counsel who offered sage advice in matters of life, faith, and the Christian walk. There was good reason for it. Grandma suffered a multitude of hardships in life; however, beginning at the age of thirteen she began learning to rely on Christ as her helper to grow in and through the challenges life brought her way. She dedicated her life, and believed it was her calling, to serving others by telling them about Christ and helping to nurture them to maturity. Had she not relied on God throughout the years and trusted him to see her through, her hardships would have produced far different results.

My grandmother's earliest memory was when she was four years old, an event that altered her life dramatically and was indelibly imprinted on her mind. On a warm August day, the family decided to go on a picnic. Her father was carrying her when he suddenly put her down, complaining of a severe pain in his side. He was rushed to the hospital where he had surgery for appendicitis. Unfortunately, he died a few days later, leaving his twenty-eight-year-old wife with the responsibility of caring for their seven children.

Grandma was in the third grade when she faced another major life hurdle. Doctors diagnosed her with tuberculosis and told her mother she would not live to be an adult. She was sent to live with her grandparents, where she lived until her health improved enough so that she could return home in time to enter fourth grade; she made it through the year but had to repeat the grade since her body was still very weak from her illness.

In 1917, war broke out with Germany and Grandma's two older brothers went off to fight the war. A short time later the nation experienced influenza and scarlet fever epidemics and Grandma's mother was quarantined as she helped take care of neighbor families. At the age of fourteen and now as the eldest child at home, Grandma took on the added burden of managing the household and providing full-time care for her younger siblings (her mother had remarried and had three more children). During this time her stepfather contracted scarlet fever, leaving him weak and not able to work much. Her mother once again became the main breadwinner, requiring my grandma's assistance all the more. Despite her responsibilities, grandma was determined to finish high school. With her youngest sister in a baby buggy, grandma walked to school once every two weeks to pick up new assignments. Finally, in 1923, at the age of twenty, grandma completed her high school education.

These hardships were only the beginning of many more experiences grandma would face over the course of her ninety-two years, and which would help mold her character and develop her wisdom. Yet, it was her dependence on God's provisions and guidance that were her greatest resource, and which carried her through much adversity, trials, and change, including more illnesses and surgeries, heartbreaks, family problems, the Great Depression, World War II, and a host of others. Ultimately, these experiences, her determination to grow and mature in Christ, her dedication to service, and a life bathed in prayer helped produce the woman others came to recognize and seek out as a woman of spiritual strength and wisdom—an Elder-at-the-Fire.

What is an Elder-at-the-Fire?

An Elder-at-the-Fire is a follower of Christ, yet an ordinary person with strengths and weaknesses, hopes and dreams, trials and joys, just like any other person. An Elder-at-the-Fire may be a pastor, teacher, leader in the church, janitor, store clerk, office worker, doctor, missionary, or waste collector. The identity of an Elder-at-the-Fire is not determined by age, gender, race, title, vocation, position, or role in ministry; rather, it is demonstrated in Missional Generativity—embodying the Gospel message through generative actions while relationally investing in others’ lives for the purpose of helping create mature disciples. An Elder-at-the-Fire is a pathfinder who is able to guide those within their sphere of influence to finding wholeness and recognizing their own God-given calling. Ultimately, an Elder-at-the-Fire becomes a long-term role model in a master-apprentice relationship, developing others to become an Elder-at-the-Fire for future generations.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term used for elder is *zagen* and means “to be or to become old.”² This term generally referred to an aged man or someone with a gray beard. In the Hebrew culture, an aged person was to be treated with respect simply because of their long life, advanced years, and potential for offering wise counsel. Because of this, they were given places of honor in their family or tribe. This same term is also used to describe those who had a ruling or governing role in the life of their community or tribe. The New Testament term for elder is the Greek word *presbuteros* and is often translated as priest. This term is used more specifically to describe those who

² Larry Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1985), 280. (Elders: 243).

were assigned to a leadership position of elder and usually had explicit criteria the individual must meet in order to function in that role. These positions varied, but often referred to members of a council with decision-making or ruling responsibilities, or for those given oversight responsibilities to a group of Christians.³ “No complete picture of the role of the elder can be drawn from scripture. And that role undoubtedly changed with historical conditions.”⁴

In the present day, many churches and religious organizations use the term elder to describe a board or council member, or someone who has an administrative, policy making, or governing role within the church. Although an Elder-at-the-Fire may serve in this capacity within their local or global church, these roles do not define an Elder-at-the-Fire; it is not a position or a title, nor is it a program or a policy. The Elder-at-the-Fire is a representative of God’s heart, mind, and purpose in *who* he or she is, and has the added ability to transfer spiritual wisdom in a way that relates to others and contextualizes it in their culture. As the Old Testament’s elders were given a place of respect due to advanced years and life experiences, the Elder-at-the-Fire is revered and sought out by others for their good judgment, wisdom, and sage counsel.

British evangelist T. Austin Sparks provides a description that aptly depicts how the Elder-at-the-Fire role stands apart from the modern-day views of church elders: “The identity of the vessel with its ministry is the very heart of Divine thought. A man is called

³ Trent C. Butler, *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), s.v. “Elder,” accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/hbd/view.cgi?n=1763>; Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), s.v. “Elder,” accessed November 19, 2011, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/elder/>; Larry Richards, 280-81. (Elders: 243-245).

⁴ Richards, *Expository Dictionary*, 243.

to represent the thoughts of God, to represent them in what he *is*, not in something that he takes up as a form or line of ministry, not in something that he does. The vessel itself is the ministry and you cannot divide between the two.”⁵ The Elder-at-the-Fire is called to represent the wisdom of God in *who* he or she is.

Elder-at-the-Fire Metaphor

In ancient biblical times and in many tribal communities, the role of elder was a revered role of one who was recognized and sought out as a person of great wisdom. The elder knew their history and culture and in an oral tradition shared wisdom, gained through deep life experiences, to offer hope, healing, and guidance to the members of their community or tribe. In tribal cultures, elders often shared their wisdom around the fire—the place where their community came for warmth, light, nourishment, and fellowship. Fire was essential to their way of life and central to the community.

Likewise, the Elder-at-the-Fire serves as a wisdom-guide to help lead others to wholeness, spiritual health, and maturity in Christ. Metaphorically, the Elder-at-the-Fire sits at the fire—the presence of God—and from that position relationally apprentices others as they journey into the Christ story (In Part II of this book, we’ll explore this epic story by describing it as the *missiongenepic narrative*, and explain its importance to the Elder-at-the-Fire metaphor).

To further understand this metaphor, it is helpful to understand what causes a fire to ignite. There are three components necessary to make a fire: oxygen, fuel, and heat;

⁵ T. Austin Sparks, *Prophetic Ministry: A Classic Study on the Nature of a Prophet* (Shippensburg: MercyPlace Ministries, 2000), 15.

without each one of these elements present, the fire will not ignite. If one element is removed, an active fire will eventually be extinguished.⁶ I'm sure most of you have experienced the frustration of trying to light a fire or keeping one going, especially when trying to light a campfire! If all three conditions are present, then lighting and maintaining a fire is easy. However, when one of the components is missing, or altered in some way, such as wood (fuel) that is too wet, a fire can sometimes be all but impossible to light or keep going.

This metaphor also relates to the Christian's life. Leonard Sweet, in his book *So Beautiful*, describes a triadic relationship that can be applied to the fire metaphor. Sweet describes three words that he claims "encode the secret to a disciple's life,"⁷ *Missional*, *Relational*, and *Incarnational*, and he calls this MRI. Sweet further relates these terms to how Jesus describes himself, The Way (missional), the Truth (relational), and the Life (incarnational). In this context, missional as the Way is the "mind of God," the Truth (relational) is the "heart of God," and the incarnational Life represents the "hand of God."⁸ Keeping this in mind, the metaphor of fire for the Elder expands—the Elder-at-the-Fire becomes, in essence, God's Word made flesh to dwell among others (Jn 1:14); this is only achieved by living in the presence of the Fire. For the Elder-at-the-Fire, MRI can be portrayed as: Missional as the Way (mind of God) is the fuel, Relational Truth (heart of God) provides the warmth or heat necessary to ignite and keep the fire burning,

⁶ James Angle, *Firefighting Strategies and Tactics* (Albany, NY: Delmar Thomson Learning, 2001), 33.

⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 26.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-31.

and Incarnational Life (hand of God) provides life-giving oxygen. The process of becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire involves an interchange between knowing the mind of God, being in tune with the heart of God, and being God’s hand to the world. Figure 1 portrays how these three come together to make up the Fire metaphor. In Part II, we will investigate this triadic relationship further to incorporate both missional and generative components to form the concept of Missional Generativity.

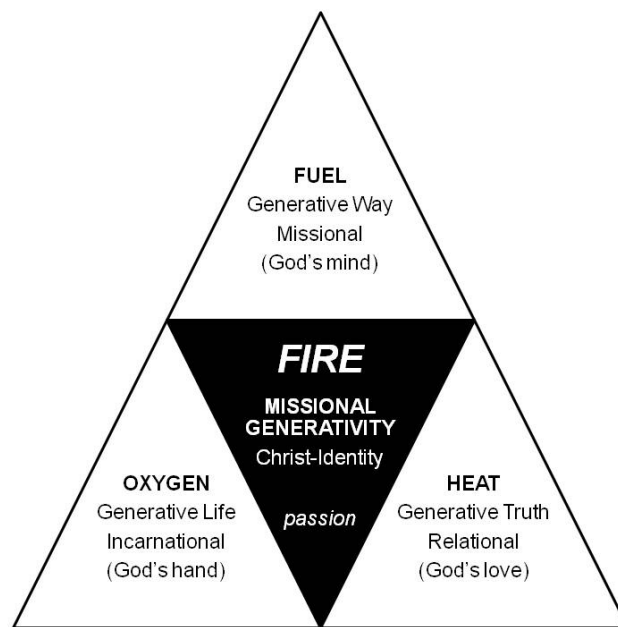


Figure 8 - Fire Metaphor Applied to Sweet’s Triad

Sweet further explains the MRI triad as “the design by which humans and their communities best construct narrative identities and senses of self.”⁹ In the book *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion*, the editors describe what it means to be a spiritual elder and the importance of achieving a sense of self through deep personal interaction with the

⁹ Ibid., 29.

spirit, which for purposes of the Elder-at-the-Fire metaphor we will refer to as the Fire, the Spirit of God.

What does it mean to be a spiritual elder and how is it different from just being old? A spiritual elder is one who has done the inner work necessary to come to elderhood from the source of spirit. Spiritual elders first must come into deep and enduring contact with their spiritual nature; then they can bring that nature to whatever roles they play in society. In this sense, being a spiritual elder modifies how we play many types of social roles. This concept of the role of spiritual elder is flexible enough to accommodate the realities of our postmodern world, because it does not center the role within a religious context. However, the spiritual elder can also be a role in itself in contexts that are explicitly spiritual or religious. Spiritual elders are mentors and wisdom keepers, but spiritual elders do not see wisdom as a commodity to possess; they see it is a process that depends on connection to spirit. ... When people are recognized as sages—venerated for their experience, judgment, and wisdom—they have become actualized as spiritual elders.¹⁰

The Elder-at-the-Fire, then, is a spiritual guide who has accomplished the hard work of letting go of self-identity to allow the Holy Spirit to alter their sense of self into identity in Christ—his mind, his way, and his heart. In this way the Elder's narratives are incarnated within the Christ-narrative. By this, the Elder-at-the-Fire is able to lead others individually and collectively to a place of restoration and wholeness.

Need for Elder-at-the-Fire

We are living in a period of time that is changing at dizzying speeds. Our world is in the midst of an escalating global political, technological, religious, and cultural super-storm that affects the permanence and solidity of all institutional and social structures. The high velocity of change our society has experienced in recent years has left many feeling disoriented and unsure of their identity or place in the world.

¹⁰ Melvin Kimble and Susan McFadden, *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 2:34-35.

With the increasing upsurge of mass media's influence, pop culture has heavily influenced the quantum swell of cultural change. In addition, an ever-increasing overload of information and choices buffet the mind and challenge personal and moral values, which has created a rapid change and acceptance of alternate cultural and ethical mores. Individuals and groups are onslaught with a barrage of media products, images, ideals, and concepts. The magnitude, intensity, and variety of changes have accelerated so fast that they have disturbed our cultural psyches on an unprecedented level. The "qualitative difference between this and all previous lifetimes is ... a stream of change so accelerated that it influences our sense of time, revolutionizes the tempo of daily life, and affects the very way we 'feel' the world around us."¹¹

All of these changes, along with the general busyness of life, have had a direct impact on the Church and its ability to develop Christians into full maturity. Some of the issues that have had direct bearing on the Church include the following: a sense of impermanence or transiency; permeable borders, both physical and virtual, that allow for thoughts and values to cross borders that once were solid; increasing tolerance and acceptance of other worldviews and religions; rising interest in spirituality and spiritual quests that may encompass and assimilate multiple religious belief systems; widening gaps between religious and cultural ideologies; altered acceptance of divergent moral and ethical standards; economic depression, expanding the chasm between the rich and the poor; decreased sense of personal and national security; life lived more in public space and less in private; heightened stress due to global events; escalating random shootings, terrorism, and threats of persecution; a shifting balance of economic and political power;

¹¹ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam, 1990), 17.

and growing recognition of the plight of the poor along with an upsurge in humanitarian response. This list is not exhaustive, but represents many of the challenges with which God's people are faced. The Christian narrative easily gets lost or distorted among so many competing or false narratives that it makes it harder for the individual to understand their sense of self in relation to Christ and his purpose.

One of the roles of culture is to establish a sense of identity and shared values. The fast-paced changes influencing the world's societies have essentially pulled off a scam of massive identity theft, leaving people and institutions feeling insecure and disoriented as they've become lost in ever-changing narratives.

Earlier in human history, in slow-changing traditional societies buffered from outside influences, people's lives usually expressed and fulfilled what they believed and valued. ... Their lives flowed rather directly along the paths laid out by their understanding of the world, and it all made sense. But as the modern world emerged, the pace of change accelerated. With the rise of scientific and technological worldviews, and with the movement of people to cities to participate in the market economy, life paths diverged more and more from what people valued.¹²

It's becoming increasingly difficult for individuals, including Christians, to make sense and meaning of their lives and world. Attempting to navigate a storm of this enormity is overwhelming and often feels fruitless. The result is that many Christian communities and individuals remain spiritually immature or seek alternative paths to spirituality. In conjunction with these feelings, there is a growing interest in spirituality sought through self-help books and websites, spiritual guides, and the assistance of life coaches, mentors, or gurus in the search for meaning. In addition, many have developed

¹² Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* (New York: Harmony Books, 2000), 47.

an interest in participating in local and global humanitarian efforts, displaying a felt need to be of use to the world.

The Barna Group, “widely considered to be a leading research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture,”¹³ claims that “spiritual immaturity is one of the most serious problems facing the Church.”¹⁴ George Gallup, Jr., in an address to Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, related survey findings that concur with this malady:

Surveys reveal an unprecedented desire for religious and spiritual growth among people in all walks of life and in every region of the nation. There is an intense searching for spiritual moorings, a hunger for God. It is for churches to seize the moment and to direct this often vague and free-floating spirituality into a solid and lived-out faith. The key is ... too many pastors naively assume that church members know and understand the core doctrines of their own faith. ... Someone has to challenge people to be true disciples of Christ. ... Someone has to ask the hard questions. If we don’t talk about the whole dimension of sin, repentance, grace and forgiveness, what is the faith all about? What are we doing? ... Without true discipleship, the church can simply turn into a social services agency.¹⁵

Futurist Leonard Sweet warned in a Facebook post that “The worst problem any species can have is a reproduction crisis, and the reproduction crisis among Protestants is grave and will be fatal unless we do something different to pass on to succeeding generations what it means to be a follower of Jesus.”¹⁶ This is a serious crisis!

¹³ “About Barna Group,” Barna Group, accessed May 23, 2013, <http://www.barna.org/about>.

¹⁴ “Barna Studies the Research, Offers a Year-in-review Perspective,” Barna Group, December 18, 2009, accessed July 19, 2010, <https://www.barna.org/component/content/article/36-promos/homepage-main-promo/326-barna-studies-the-research-offers-a-year-in-review-perspective#.VkGXgrerQrg>.

¹⁵ Terry Mattingly, “Gallup On Statistics and Discipleship,” Virtue Online: The Voice for Global Orthodox Anglicanism, accessed July 28, 2012, <http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=1104#.UBRfTrSe64I>.

¹⁶ Leonard Sweet’s Facebook Page, accessed May 25, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/lensweet?fref=ts>.

This crisis points to a lack of leaders capable of being torch bearers and trail blazers to assist struggling Christians to individually and collectively find health, wholeness, meaning, and maturity in Christ. For this reason, we need new spiritual Elders. Terry Jones, former mental health consultant and founder of the *Elderhood Institute*, states that “once elders were ... the source of blessing and taught young people about the mystery of our oneness with the universe. They fostered an oral tradition and offered wisdom to younger folks. What happened?”¹⁷ Where are the Christian elders who are able to impart life-wisdom and instill within disciples the deep and necessary identification with Christ that leads to Christian maturity? The Church needs new leaders to emerge who are willing to accept the calling and embark on the journey to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire.

The world is hungry for spiritual elders, and the Church has access to the greatest resource to assist others on their journey; but it lacks leaders who have been developed to the level of maturity required for the role of an Elder-at-the-Fire. However, there is hope. Nationally recognized artist Makoto Fujimura, who is concerned about the generative care of our culture, writes:

We have done little to cultivate the soil of culture for the next generation, so efforts we make now to plant seeds of culture will likely not yield significant results for some time. This is a bleak assessment, but it may be encouraging to reflect on parallels in the natural world: volcanic soil is highly fertile, and forest fires can benefit the ecosystem. The right conditions and care make rapid regeneration possible in the aftermath of many disasters.¹⁸

¹⁷ Terry Jones, *Elder: A Spiritual Alternative to Being Elderly* (Portland, OR: Elderhood Institute Books, 2006), i.

¹⁸ Makoto Fujimura, *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life* (New York: Fujimura Institute, 2014), 25.

This is the role of an Elder-at-the-Fire: the care and spiritual nourishment for the next generation! Elders-at-the-Fire are the essential catalysts critical to helping the Church further the kingdom of God through this time of rapid cultural shifts and volatile change our world is experiencing.

The ancients, as well as modern primitive cultures, relied on elders to lead them—men and women of character honed through deep life experiences, who knew their history and culture, who were aware of life's pitfalls, and had a clear vision of what the future could be. This wealth of accumulated experience and knowledge endowed elders with invaluable life-wisdom. Those elders frequently found their places around the flickering campfires of a thousand nights, and there, in the intimate setting of dying days, transferred their life-wisdom through stories to the younger generations. The Elder-at-the-Fire will find their place at the Fire of Missional Generativity, to become God's head, his heart, and his hands, and in so doing help bring healing and renewal to God's children.

Elder-at-the-Fire Calling

Leaving a legacy is an intrinsic need for humankind, whether it is a desire to bestow financial security to family or a benevolent group, to make a mark in the world and place your name in the history books, to create a piece of art, to simply be remembered; or, most importantly, to add something of value to the world that makes it a better place. For the Christian, the legacy should always lead to Jesus and encourage those who follow to become part of a larger Christian narrative. Scripture records that, as King David's death became imminent, he charged his son, Solomon, with a legacy he

desired to pass on, saying, “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, that the Lord may establish his Word that he spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel’” (1 Kgs 2:1-4 ESV). This is the type of legacy a Christian should desire to leave, a legacy of faithfulness that extends into future generations. There are many ways God uses his children to leave a legacy, and I believe it is safe to say that the innate legacy we desire to pass on directly relates to the calling God places in our hearts from the moment of conception.

The calling to become an Elder-at-the-Fire may first be felt as a desire to leave a legacy. This inborn desire is an intense yearning for a deeper level of knowing and intimacy with Christ and is the seed of a calling on one’s life, which, if nurtured, will actualize itself in the individual’s heart and mind with a certainty that this is God’s calling upon their life. “This yearning prompts us to search within the source of spiritual connectedness. Out of this search comes wisdom ... which we can transmit to the generations that follow.”¹⁹

The Elder-at-the-Fire is compelled to share wisdom, but not for the purpose of displaying wealth of knowledge; their intention is not to expound on theories, doctrines, or a set of mores or rules, but to share heart wisdom (Ps 51:6, 90:12). For the Elder-at-the-Fire, heart wisdom is born from a depth of experiences, faith, and a life surrendered

¹⁹ Kimble and McFadden, *Aging, Spirituality*, 2:38.

to Jesus Christ and emerges as their calling comes into fruition. Wisdom of the heart is nurtured by studying God's Word, spending time in prayer and reflection, exercising faith, listening to the Holy Spirit, and developing a close personal relationship with God. Sharing heart wisdom generatively transfers Truth into the hearts and lives of others; thus the Elder-at-the-Fire does not view wisdom as something to keep, but as something to give away.

The Church needs new elders to accept this call; men and women who hear God's voice and are willing to enter the journey and discipline of becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. In so doing, these new elders will, like the ancient Hebrew elder Moses, lead their people (the ones God gives them) through life's trials and chaos, into a new land.

When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders came to me. And you said, "The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire." (Deut. 5:23-24).

Fire Starters

As you continue reading through this book, it may be helpful to document your thoughts by writing or recording them in some manner. Journaling is an effective means many people use to capture thoughts. It is also a good way to chronicle your journey as you contemplate the content of each chapter.

To help you begin this process, here are some questions and activities to get you started.

1. Can you identify any person(s) who you believe may be an Elder-at-the-Fire?

What qualities and characteristics define them in this role?

2. What hardships have you overcome that have helped mold who you are today?
3. Do you feel a calling to invest in nurturing others as an Elder-at-the-Fire in an apprenticeship relationship? If so, what are the nudgings and yearnings you have felt that indicate God may be calling you to this role?

Pastors and Church Leaders:

4. Observe members of your congregation. Identify those whose life reflects a genuine desire to organically care for and motivate others for spiritual growth, and who have the ability to relate with others across varying social structures and generations. Make a list of these individuals. As you read through this book, prayerfully consider whether they may be a potential Elder-at-the-Fire. Continue observing and adding or deleting from the list as the Spirit directs.

Chapter 2

Generating a Living Fire

*Do you realize what I have done for you?
I have given you a model to follow,
So that as I have done this for you,
You should also do.
—Jesus*

(Jn 13:12b, 15 NABRE)

The Bible contains many instances of relationships that exemplify an Elder-at-the-Fire with their apprentice. A full study of biblical examples could be exhaustive; for purposes of this book we will look at two that illuminate the metaphor of Elder-at-the-Fire. In this chapter we'll first explore the eldership relationship between Elijah and Elisha as precursor to the New Testament example of Jesus with his twelve disciples. These examples provide a two-pronged approach as applied to Elder-at-the-Fire: the example of Elijah illustrates the journey of *becoming* an Elder-at-the-Fire, while Jesus' life exemplifies *being* an Elder-at-the-Fire.

Elijah

Elijah is an intriguing character whose entrance into the story in 1 Kings 17 is abrupt, dramatic, and unexpected. Elijah's vocation was that of a prophet, and because of his fiery nature and God's use of fire in his life, he is often referred to as the Prophet of Fire. This makes Elijah a very appropriate example for the Elder-at-the-Fire metaphor. When Elijah comes on the scene there is no indication that he was a potential Elder-at-the-Fire, which is another reason why his journey is an appropriate illustration. Most

Elders will not initially be recognized as an Elder-at-the-Fire. In fact, many would-be Elders-at-the-Fire may not even suspect that God will use them in this manner later in their ministry. I believe such is the case with Elijah.

Before discussing Elijah's pathway to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire, it is helpful to understand the context into which the story takes place, beginning with the admonition King David gave Solomon to walk in the ways of the Lord and the consequences if he abandoned God's ways.

Solomon was thrust onto the throne at a very young age, totally unprepared to lead a country. Shortly after he ascended the throne, God appeared to him in a dream inviting Solomon to ask for whatever he wanted; Solomon replied:

I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours? (1Kgs 3:7b-9).

God was very pleased with Solomon's request and bestowed upon him the gift of wisdom, declaring that he would be wiser than anyone before or after him. Additionally, because Solomon's request was unselfish, God also promised him wealth and honor above all of his contemporary kings.

Solomon continued to reign over Israel and walk in God's ways, and his great wisdom became well known. In the fourth year of his sovereignty, Solomon began the construction of the Lord's temple. For the next twenty years Solomon continued to build, taking seven years to complete the temple and an additional thirteen years to build his personal residence. After the Arc of the Covenant was brought into the temple Solomon dedicated the temple. The Lord was very pleased and covenanted with Solomon to bring

about the promises originally given to his father, David. However, God also warned Solomon of what would happen to the nation of Israel should he abandon God's ways for idol worship:

But if you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, "Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this temple?" People will answer, "Because they have forsaken the Lord their God, who brought their ancestors out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why the Lord brought all this disaster on them." (1 Kgs 9:6-9).

Unfortunately, Solomon had a weakness for women, and despite God's forbiddance to the Israelites to intermarry with women of other nationalities, he had hundreds of foreign wives and concubines. As time went on, Solomon began to follow the gods of his wives, and this disobedience began a chain of events that divided the nation of Israel and plunged it into an era of sin, with each succeeding king bringing more idol worship, culminating with King Ahab and his wife Jezebel:

Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him (1 Kgs 16:29-33).

It is in this context that Elijah enters the story with a bold proclamation to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word" (1 Kgs 17:1b). This is our introduction to Elijah. He appears from out of obscurity; the only information scripture provides about him is

that he was a Tishbite from the region of Galilee. We do not know anything about the family, home, occupation, or anything else that Elijah might have left in order to become God's messenger. However, there are some things which can be inferred about Elijah from this short passage.

The first thing to note is that Elijah believed in and served a living God. In fact, his relationship was such that he had the confidence to approach a king and declare that only upon his own words would God send rain. Wow! That's quite the proclamation. To have this kind of assurance Elijah must have been following God for some time, been knowledgeable in his ways, believed in his sovereignty, lived in obedience, and trusted in God's direction. This information is critical in understanding the process of becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire.

An Elder-at-the-Fire is not born, nor does an individual become an Elder-at-the-Fire upon salvation. There must be a period of time, often a time of obscurity, in which that salvation takes root and grows. One must be knowledgeable of scripture, have a consistent prayer life, live in obedience, and be willing to do God's work. Although these qualifications do not automatically make one an Elder-at-the-Fire, they are essential to the calling.

My grandmother's sister, Maude, could quote scripture like there was no tomorrow. Her knowledge of scripture was amazing; I marveled at her ability. Although Maude had committed a multitude of scriptures to memory, she had not absorbed or applied them into her daily life. She and her husband attended church faithfully in their younger adult years, until tragedy struck. Their son was in the Coast Guard and was called to respond to a boat in distress in the icy ocean waters. Although he helped save all

the passengers on the boat, in so doing he lost his own life and his body was never recovered. Instead of using the scriptures and her relationship with God to ease her grief, Maude turned to alcohol. Her grief and the effects of alcohol on her life eventually led to divorce. She spent many years struggling through various broken relationships, problems with her other son, and a series of hardships. Yet, she continued to quote scripture. Later in life she became sober through Alcoholics Anonymous, and after much counsel with my grandmother, eventually restored her relationship with God. Would she have been called to be an Elder-at-the-Fire? I don't know, but the years spent depending on alcohol instead of God robbed her and others of what could have been a wonderful legacy.

I have known many young pastors, fresh from seminary, who felt they could take on the world. Even though they were educated, ordained, and appointed to the vocation of pastor, these credentials did not qualify them as an Elder-at-the-Fire. In fact, many of these young pastors could have benefitted from the wise counsel of and apprenticeship under an Elder-at-the-Fire.

The point is this, the pathway to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire is a long journey. Not all make it; not all are called. However, for all who are called, there is a time of obscurity in which knowledge, growth, and maturity must develop, often through life's adversity and trials, and the calling and commissioning to Elder-at-the-Fire often comes only later in ministry after achieving many years of experience. When we encounter Elijah in this story, God has more plans for his preparation before he is ready to become an Elder-at-the-Fire.

Immediately after Elijah made his proclamation to King Ahab, God told Elijah to hide. The command to hide seems like a contradiction to God's bold purpose upon

Elijah's life, but there is no indication that Elijah thought this an odd request. God did not send him to a luxurious hotel or a tropical hideaway; he sent him to hide in a ravine by the Kerith brook where ravens would provide him with bread and meat. Can you imagine what it must have been like to rely on ravens for food? Despite the oddity of this direction upon his life, Elijah immediately obeyed, trusting God for protection and sustenance.

Since we don't know much about Elijah, we do not know whether he was used to being alone, but scripture tells us he was a man "like us" (Jas 5:17), so it is only reasonable to expect that he suffered from loneliness during this exile. I imagine that initially his hideout was a place of respite and refreshment, soon loneliness crept in, and finally the brook dried up! What a depressing and pathetic image this conjures! The draught that Elijah called upon the land had also affected him; God's provisions dried up! This is so true of life—everyone at one time or another goes through periods in life where they feel like their brook has dried up. Staying faithful in the dry season was important to Elijah's preparation (as it is for all Christians) for his future prophetic role as well as to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire.

However, God did not forget about Elijah; he just had another plan! God instructed Elijah to go to Zarephath in the region of Sidon, where he would find a widow woman to provide him with shelter and food. Leaving a dried-up brook in anticipation of a bed, home-cooked meals, someone to talk to, and a roof over his head must have filled him with hope and excitement, and presented some trepidation as well; the journey to Zarephath would take him through enemy territory, directly into the home town of wicked Queen Jezebel, who wanted him dead. It would only be natural for Elijah to

experience fear along the way; this is when the Christian must heed the prayer, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me” (Ps 23:4 KJV).

The widow at Zarephath was getting ready to prepare a last meal for herself and her son when Elijah met her at the town gate and requested she bring him water and bread. She replied, “As surely as the Lord your God lives ... I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die” (1 Kgs 17:12). This was probably not the welcome Elijah expected to receive, and perhaps it made Elijah feel somewhat guilty for her condition since he had pronounced the drought. Despite her unwelcoming response, Elijah assured the widow woman that her flour and oil would not run out until the rain came again. Having just traveled from a dried up brook, this indicates Elijah had learned to trust in God’s provisional ability.

After some time living with the widow, her son became ill and died. Angry over her son’s death, the widow blamed Elijah and his God. Elijah must have been stricken with grief as well; certainly he had developed a relationship with the son. Elijah then took the son and prayed fervently, calling upon God to restore the boy’s life. God answered Elijah, resulting in the woman’s salvation.

Over the course of time Elijah was at the brook and while with the widow woman, he demonstrated obedience and experienced God’s protection and provisions; he demonstrated faith and declared to others what God would do; and, finally, he accessed God’s power, beseeching him through fervent prayer to bring life into the home of the widow woman and her son. The time Elijah spent at the both the brook at Kerith and in

the widow's home "serve as a private period of preparation ... Elijah moves from passive to active readiness. These deeds are his credentials, his prophetic legitimacy is established."¹ Elijah's personal drought period also served as preparation for his later role as Elder-at-the-Fire.

The story at this point takes a dramatic turn. After three long years of famine, God gives Elijah permission to stop the draught. Once again Elijah confronted Ahab, challenging him to a duel of sorts. He requested that all the people of Israel meet on Mt. Carmel while the prophets of Baal and Asherah and Elijah have a contest to prove whose god is the one true God. Elijah offers a test; the Baal prophets will try to call down fire upon a bull sacrificed on an altar with wood, and Elijah would do the same, then he challenged them, "you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God." The Baal prophets called upon their gods and danced around the altar to no avail; their gods did not respond. Elijah then told the people to pour four large jars of water over the wood on his altar; he asked them to do this three times so that the altar was drenched and overflowing with water. Then he called upon God. "Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!" (1 Kgs 18:38-39). Elijah then commanded all the false prophets to be killed; once this was accomplished the rains began to come. When Jezebel heard what had happened she sent a messenger to Elijah declaring she would kill him.

¹ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 1.

In spite of all of God's provisions and the power manifested in Elijah's life, he was still human. Elijah became afraid, fled for his life, and prayed to die. In his despair and weakness God sent an angel to minister to him, providing fresh bread and water to restore his strength. Elijah then began a forty-day journey to the Mountain of God (Mt. Horeb) where he found a cave and fell asleep. This is when I believe Elijah feels the yearning to become an Elder-at-the-Fire, and where God confirms that calling.

And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" he replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. *I am the only one left*, [author's emphasis] and now they are trying to kill me too."

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" he replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. *I am the only one left*, [author's emphasis] and now they are trying to kill me too."

The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet (1 Kgs 19:9b-17).

Pastors and theologians often refer to this episode in Elijah's life as an example of how God meets us in weakness, depression, burnout, or some other human malady; some describe Elijah as whiny; however, I propose another idea. Yes, he may have experienced all of the above, but I believe in this moment he recognized his mortality and lamented that there was no one to whom he could pass on his legacy. "I am the only one left!" Who would carry on God's work if Elijah's life was snuffed out? Elijah's cry may sound like a

self-centered, whimpering complaint, but in reality it came from a place of recognition of the transiency of human life, and the importance of being able to pass something on to the next generation before it was too late. This was not a selfish cry; it was a concern for the future of the Israelites and God's kingdom.

A person who is called to be an Elder-at-the-Fire will come to a point in life where they realize this same concern. God heard Elijah's cry and verified his calling by instructing Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor. Thus Elijah's time of preparation and pilgrimage set him on a new journey as Elder-at-the-Fire.

Elijah's Pilgrimage to Elder-at-the-Fire

Within the Elijah narrative are woven several pilgrimage journeys significant to his preparation for becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire.

The first journey God sent him on was to provide protection. Elijah had just declared himself as a messenger from God and confronted King Ahab's evil practices and declared God's punishment. After a season of ministry, often God recognizes a need for protection and rest for his servants. Sending Elijah to hide in the Kerith Ravine was for such a purpose; God was protecting him for future service. This was the beginning of a draught period in Elijah's life, which further dehydrated over time until the ground was parched, drying up the brook (1 Kgs 17:2-7). Empty of life-sustaining water, God sent Elijah on his second pilgrimage.

His second journey led him through his enemy's region, directly into the town from which Jezebel came. First God hid him in a ravine, next God hid Elijah in plain sight! This journey represents faith and being in community with others. The drought

period in Elijah's life was not finished, but yet again God provided him not only with food for sustenance, but this time also shelter and companionship. When the widow's son died, it was as if the brook had dried up again; life had literally drained from the son. With great faith, Elijah fervently beseeched God on the widow son's behalf and his life was generatively restored, leading to the widow's belief in the author of Life (1 Kgs 17:8-24).

Elijah's next journey shifts his ministry from hiding back into public view. After three years of draught, Elijah embarks on a return trip to pick up where he left off, once again confronting Ahab but this time also issuing a challenge. Rested and armed with faith and power, Elijah is ready to claim before the entire nation from of Israel the one true God. The exhibition that follows not only proves Elijah's God to be the God of Fire, but also establishes the Kingdom of God as the one true Kingdom (1 Kgs 18). Take note that this segment in Elijah's narrative is a "return." This is important in understanding the importance of pilgrimage and will be discussed further in Part III.

Coming down off of a mountaintop experience often leaves the Christian vulnerable for attack. Such is true in the case of Elijah; his very life was threatened by Jezebel. In moments of duress, human nature is to either fight or flight; Elijah chose flight. This may appear as a weakness in Elijah's character, but it is in our weaknesses where God ministers to us and can make us strong (1 Cor 12:9). Burned out, depressed, weary and worn, Elijah is ready to give up. He has had enough! He is drained—like the dried-up brook, his resources are gone; his spirit is depleted, and so he fled to the wilderness. Once again God meets Elijah's need, sending an angel to comfort, nourish, and restore him. (1 Kgs 19:1-5).

In times of discouragement or depression, it is easy to neglect one's own needs and find ways to avoid life. However, the angel does not allow Elijah to languish in self-pity and depression. The angel nudged Elijah, waking him to provide freshly baked bread and water, then allowed Elijah to fall back to sleep. After a period of rest, the angel once again prodded Elijah to get up and eat, but this time the angel explained why Elijah needed the nourishment; he was once again to embark upon another pilgrimage! Elijah journeyed forty days and forty nights until he reached Mt. Horeb. Tired from the long trip, he settled into a cave to rest for the night. God met Elijah on the mountain, renewing him for service as a prophet and establishing him as an Elder-at-the-Fire for Elisha (1 Kgs 19:7-9).

God then sent Elijah upon another journey: "go back the way you came!" In other words, "return!" On this journey, Elijah has a renewed purpose for his prophetic ministry along with the authority to anoint others for service, two as kings and one as his protégé. The journey back would also serve as the final stretch before he assumed the role of pilgrim guide to apprentice Elisha to take his place (1 Kgs 19:15-19). In this role, he would now serve as an Elder-at-the-Fire.

God called Elijah to be an Elder-at-the-Fire, to train and transfer his mantle to Elisha, filled with a future in God's presence. Although most Christians are not called to the types of prophetic adventures and miracles characterized by Elijah's vocational calling, the progression of events in Elijah's life help provide an understanding of the elements essential in becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire. Entering the calling of an Elder-at-the-Fire is to enter a long-term relationship of master-apprentice. God does the calling and provides the disciple(s) to be apprenticed.

Elijah and Elisha

The calling of Elisha seems somewhat random. Elijah did not speak to Elisha and tell him that God wanted him to anoint Elisha as his apprentice. While Elisha was busy working in the field, Elijah suddenly removed his mantle and threw it over Elisha's shoulders. Elisha must have understood the significance as his response to Elijah was immediate. He had obviously felt a nudging and was waiting for God to show him the path to ministry. Elisha's only request was to say good-bye to his family and settle his affairs before following Elijah. Elijah's response seems strange: "What have I done to you?" This, I believe, was a test to see if Elisha was truly willing to separate from his old life in order to enter into the apprenticeship and service of Elijah. It was not Elijah's responsibility to coerce Elisha into service; Elisha had to willingly let go of his former life in order to begin his journey at Elijah's side (1 Kgs 19:19-21).

Not much is written about the years Elijah and Elisha journeyed together, but the evidence of the relationship is apparent in the transfer of the mantle and Elisha's succeeding prophetic ministry. The culmination of the eldering relationship between Elijah and Elisha is evidenced by the process and manner in which the anointing was transferred.

Although Elisha was aware that Elijah's departure from earth was imminent, he refused to leave his side, even though Elijah repeatedly encouraged him to do so. Three times Elijah instructed Elisha to stay behind, and three times Elisha's reply was, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you" (2 Kgs 2:2b). After the third time, when they had crossed over the Jordan, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" (2 Kgs 2:9). It is a testament to Elijah's life that

Elisha requested to be bequeathed a double portion of Elijah's spirit—in other words, he wanted more of God. However, Elijah made no promise except, "If you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not" (2 Kgs 2:10). This may seem an abrupt reply, but Elijah realized it was not up to him to grant this request. As God chose whom Elijah should anoint, God would also determine whether or not Elisha was worthy to receive the mantle to carry on Elijah's role and calling.

While engaged in the ordinary events of life, walking and talking together, Elijah was suddenly taken up to heaven by a chariot and horses of fire. Because Elisha's heart was right, he was witness to the event and, as a result, Elijah's mantle fell from the sky, signifying the transfer of Elijah's spirit. Elisha accepted the mantle, thus shifting Elijah's anointing to a new generation.

Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. "Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over (2 Kgs 2:13-14).

Elisha's life and ministry further demonstrated that he not only learned from Elijah the vocation of prophet, but he in turn also became an Elder-at-the-Fire. Sadly, Elisha's apprentice, Gehazi, fell into greed and received a mantle of leprosy rather than a mantle of blessing. This is a difficult truth for the Elder-at-the-Fire to accept: not all receive the legacy offered; sometimes people are pulled away by their weaknesses regardless of the wisdom, counsel, and example from the Elder-at-the-Fire.

The objective of an Elder-at-the-Fire is to apprentice disciples toward becoming worthy of God's anointing. Elisha would not have received the mantle if he had not willingly left all he had, committed his life to serve under the apprenticeship of Elijah,

and been found worthy of the calling in God's eyes. Additionally, the mantle would have been worthless if Elisha had not chosen to pick it up or make use of it. In picking up the mantle and using it, Elisha signified full acceptance and willingness to assume the role for which he had been called. His acceptance and use of the mantle signified to those watching that God had ordained him as Elijah's successor.

Elijah's role of Elder-at-the-Fire was completed in Elisha. The Elder-at-the-Fire's goal for the apprentice is that they should go on to do new and greater things in the service of the Kingdom. Elisha's ministry did just that, tapping into the double portion of power and blessing that God bestowed upon him as an inheritance from Elijah.

Jesus' Entrance into Ministry

Like Elijah, Jesus essentially came out of obscurity. Although Jesus' birth was heralded by angels, visited by shepherds, and honored by wise men, he was virtually unknown; soon after these momentous events, God directed his parents to take him into hiding.

However, unlike the account of Elijah, the Bible provides some record regarding Jesus' early spiritual instruction. Luke records Jesus at the age of twelve sitting with the religious elders asking them questions and having an understanding which astounded them. From this time forward until Jesus entered his ministry, all we know is that Jesus "grew in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Lk 2:52). This period of development is vital to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire; even God in the flesh learned the scriptures and grew in goodwill with God and man in order to form the character and passion that would prepare him for the journey ahead. Likewise, the Elder-at-the-Fire is

prepared by years of study and preparation and must also grow in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man. Accumulating knowledge of the scriptures, and being able to inculcate their meaning within, arms the Elder-at-the-Fire to be ready answer for the hope that marks the Elder's life (1 Pt 3:15). Scripture also admonishes us to "keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Jo 1:8).

It is interesting to note that Jesus' ministry also began with a public acknowledgement. His introduction to ministry was announced by John the Baptist, telling his followers that there would be another, with more authority and power than he, who would "baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire." Shortly thereafter, Jesus appeared at the Jordan where John was baptizing and requested that he baptize him also. John was startled and confused; he provided water baptism for repentance and he knew that Jesus had no need for repentance. At first John refused to baptize him, saying that Jesus should be the one baptizing him instead, but Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3:3). As Jesus' predecessor, John's baptism of Jesus represented a public transfer of his ministry. Additionally, upon coming up from the water, God used this opportunity to ordain Jesus as his son, confirming and establishing his authority in the kingdom of God (Mt 3:3-11).

Immediately following this acknowledgement, Jesus was separated and sent out for a Kerith experience—forty days in the desert. Like Elijah, this wilderness experience was necessary in order for Jesus to be fully ready to enter his ministry. Herein is where a key difference lies. Elijah's experience stripped him of all he was, causing him to rely fully on God for sustenance and protection. It was necessary for Elijah to be emptied of

self in order to access God's power and accomplish the tasks set before him. Jesus, on the other hand, was already filled with the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:13-16); he was literally sent into the wilderness to be tested by Satan.

Jesus remained forty days in the wilderness, fasting and praying. This is another difference between Elijah and Jesus. God provided nourishment and water to Elijah during his desert experiences; Jesus fasted. Naturally, after a time of fasting, Jesus became hungry. Knowing that Jesus would be in a weakened state, Satan began to tempt him. The first two temptations challenged Jesus' claim of being God's Son. Satan taunted Jesus, directly appealing to his hunger and then to his abilities. The third temptation was the most crucial; Satan offered Jesus the kingdom of earth—a substitute of his God-given realm of authority, the kingdom of heaven—in exchange for allegiance to him. In each case, Satan struck at a human temptation: flesh, pride, and power, but Christ countered each with the Word of God, ultimately commanding Satan to leave. Immediately after Satan left, angels came to attend Jesus (Mt 4:1-17). This is interesting when compared to Elijah being attended by angels prior to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire.

Jesus and Disciples

Before Jesus began calling his disciples, he was established as John's successor, recognized and ordained by God, and survived a wilderness experience. Jesus did not begin preaching until after he heard that John had been imprisoned; at this point he went to Galilee and began his ministry and subsequently the calling of his disciples. Like Elijah with Elisha, Jesus called them from their everyday activities, asking them to leave their former life behind to follow him.

In reading the accounts of Jesus' calling his disciples, it may appear that the calling was random; however, that is not the case. Some of the disciples were former disciples of John the Baptist, others had already become followers of Jesus. It is not clear how Jesus came to call all of them, but he knew their hearts and was assured that these were the ones God gave to him to apprentice (Jn 17:6). Jesus established a long-term relationship with his disciples as their Elder-at-the-Fire, and later referred to them as friends (Jn 15:5). Later in his ministry Jesus would remind them that he had chosen them (Jn 15:16). His choice was purposeful, not just to teach them about the kingdom of God, or to simply model the way, but to pass on the essence of who he was in order for them to be able to carry out his mission after he left this earth.

As an Elder-at-the-Fire, Jesus not only imparted knowledge, but also shared life and heart wisdom for all areas of life. He taught them the importance of relationships, including how to love even the unlovable; he taught them how to play, mourn, worship, heal, and pray. At times Jesus chastised his disciples, his patience perhaps running thin when the disciples did not seem to understand. However, Jesus always chastised in love, encouraging and strengthening his disciples, and continuously teaching through example, expounding on the Word, performing miracles, and telling stories.

Jesus used parables to challenge the disciples to ponder and puzzle out their meaning and significance. In private, the disciples would later question Jesus if they could not figure out the meaning, and as they were ready to understand Jesus would explain the mystery to them. He also made use of questions to draw the disciples into thinking for themselves or to drive home a point, such as when he asked Peter the question, "Do you love me?" (Jn 21:15-17).

Jesus demonstrated a servant's heart when he lowered himself to perform the unpleasant task of washing their road-weary, dirty, stinky feet so they could recline at the table for a meal. This act revealed Jesus' humility and the type of service to which he called his children. The disciples were appalled, so Jesus explained it to them. "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" (Jn 13:14-16). In demonstrating servanthood, Jesus provided a critical metaphor for the disciple—cleansing always comes before nourishment. However, this simple act taught a bigger lesson: to be fully part of Christ one must submit fully to his cleansing, no matter how humiliating it may be. To be a fully devoted follower, costly obedience and servant-heartedness are essential (Lk 14:27).

Jesus' goal was to make the disciples into an imitation of himself by incarnating himself within them, so that through their lives they might also incarnate God's Word to others. As an Elder-at-the-Fire, Jesus walked with the disciples with compassion, mercy, and grace, teaching them all he could within his short time on earth to prepare them to continue the work he began.

Toward the end of his time on earth, Jesus began pulling away from public ministry and invested more time with his disciples. Understanding that he would soon leave the earth, he intensified their training and challenged their devotion to him and their understanding of who he was. He questioned them as to what others were saying about him, who they believed him to be, and if they would stay with him while other followers abandoned him (Mt 16: 13-16; Mk 8:27-29). During this time, he also began speaking about the sufferings that awaited him and preparing them for his death. As the opposition

against him grew, Jesus continued to demonstrate how to stand true for God in the face of adversity. This period of time was a time of testing to make sure his disciples would be able to accept his mantle, the cross.

Before departing this earth, Jesus brought the disciples deeper into the mystery, a series of initiation rites into elderhood; all but one passed. He gave Peter a new name, declaring he would be the cornerstone of the Church (Mt 16:18). Jesus demonstrated servanthood by washing their feet (Jn 13:3-17). When the disciples met in the upper room for the Passover meal, Jesus shared with them a new sacrament of remembrance that they should keep and pass on to future generations (Mt 26:26-29, Jn 13:21-30). Jesus then gave his blessing to the disciples and promised he would send a counselor, the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26). Then Jesus prayed, acknowledging that they had become mature disciples and commissioning them to carry on his work (Jn 17:6-19). At the cross, he appointed John to take care of his mother (Jn 19:26).

What despair and confusion the disciples must have felt when Jesus was crucified. When Jesus called them to follow, none would have considered that their path would have led to this. However ...

No life ends even for this world when the body by which it has for a little been made visible disappears from the face of the earth. It enters into the stream of the ever-swelling life of mankind, and continues to act there with its whole force for evermore. Indeed, the true magnitude of a human being can often only be measured by what this after-life shows him to have been. So it was with Christ. The modest narrative of the Gospels scarcely prepares us for the outburst of creative force which issued from his life when it appeared to have ended.²

And yet, Jesus' role as Elder-at-the-Fire was not complete. In order that the disciples could bear witness to his resurrection, Jesus returned to them for a period of

² James Stalker, *The Life of Jesus Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1949), 145.

forty days, walking and talking with them, catching fish, displaying his scars, teaching more lessons, and unlocking their minds to understand the scriptures. Then Jesus commissioned them, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20a). However, one more rite of initiation was necessary before they were ready to be sent out; Jesus instructed them to remain in Jerusalem a few days to await that which he had promised (Acts 1:8). And then, the fire of the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

Jesus’ mission was not a one-time mission spanning thirty-three years and ending with his crucifixion; it was intended to continue through his followers, extending to all generations and all nations. This too is the purpose of the Elder-at-the-Fire.

Summary

Biblical elders lived in close communion with God, enabling them to hear and obey his Word and communicate it to others. Empowered by the Spirit of God, they passed along and upheld the Truth, not only for themselves but for their family, tribe, and nation. Like Christ, biblical elders strived to cultivate a missional heart in others. Biblical elders came from all walks of life and shared wisdom and spiritual knowledge to young and old, from shepherd boys to kings. In all cases, the biblical elders helped restore others to wholeness and life. This is what the Elder-at-the-Fire also does.

An Elder-at-the-Fire disciples others to take on the role of an Elder-at-the-Fire. Having gained heart wisdom through a life surrendered to God, and using lessons learned from trials and joys, the Elder-at-the-Fire imparts as much of this wisdom as possible to

the apprentice. Like Jesus, the Elder-at-the-Fire draws others into discovering God's calling upon their lives and how to live in God's presence and power. In this way, the mission of God is generatively passed on to future generations.

Fire Starters

1. Conduct your own personal study of Elijah and Jesus and chart out the similarities and differences in their lives and ministry.
2. Compare and contrast other examples of Elder-at-the-Fire relationships in the Bible against the examples of Elijah and Jesus. Suggestions for study include: Eli to Samuel, Samuel to David, Naomi to Ruth, Mordecai to Esther, Moses to Joshua, and Paul to Timothy.
 - a. What are the similarities?
 - b. What are the differences?
 - c. What new insights did you find and how do these apply to the pilgrimage or role of an Elder-at-the-Fire?
3. Using the above studies, contemplate on areas in your life which correspond to the examples studied.

Pastors and Church Leaders:

4. Using your findings from the above activities, create an outline for a sermon or Bible study based that illustrates the Elder-at-the-Fire relationship.

PART II

Finding the Fire

*Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.
They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn
for he has done it.*

—Ps 22:30-31

Chapter 3

Fire of Missional Generativity

*An old man going a lone highway,
came in the evening, cold and gray,
to a chasm vast, both deep and wide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
the swollen stream was as naught to him,
but he stopped when safe on the farther side,
and built a bridge to span the tide.*

*“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near,
“You are wasting your strength in labor here,
your journey will end with the closing day,
you never again will pass this way,
you’ve crossed the chasm deep and wide,
why build you this bridge at eventide?”*

*The laborer lifted his old gray head,
“Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said,
“there followeth after me today,
a youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm which has been naught to me,
to that young man may a pitfall be.
He, too must cross in the twilight dim,
good friend, I am building this bridge
for him.”*

—Will Allen Dromgoole¹

The above poem is a beautiful depiction of generativity. The old man apparently had many years’ experience forging the river; he had passed that way many times. However, as his years on earth were declining, he became concerned for the future generations who might not understand the nature of the river or have the experience

¹ Sandra Seagal and David Horne, *Human Dynamics: A New Framework for Understanding People and Realizing the Potential in Our Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Pegasus Communications, 1997), 311.

necessary for this type of dangerous crossing. Motivated by his concern, the old man began building a bridge; even though he knew it was unlikely he would ever cross the chasm again. A fellow traveler scoffed at the old man, claiming the man's efforts were in vain. It seemed a fruitless action, a waste of time and energy, and he further mocked the man by emphasizing his old age. The old man continued building while he patiently explained the purpose of the bridge. He knew his days were nearly gone, but his concern prompted him to find a way to make life better for future generations, and so he began building a bridge for those who would follow. This poem also illustrates that of a generative elder; instead of ignoring the other traveler, the old man used this as a teaching moment to pass forward concern for future generations.

Generativity Defined

The term, *generativity*, in its simplest form is defined as “a concern with establishing and guiding the next generation.”² German psychologist and sociologist Dr. Erik Erickson introduced this term to describe the seventh phase in the psychosocial developmental cycle. Oxford dictionary defines psychosocial as, “of or relating to the interrelation of social factors.” Erikson outlined eight stages of psychosocial behavior beginning from infancy and extending to maturity (senior years), with generativity being the final stage prior to maturity. Without generativity, successful movement to full maturity will not occur, thereby causing stagnation and leading to feelings of despair. Erikson deemed generativity to be the fundamental component “around which all life

² Erik Erickson, *Childhood and Society*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 267.

stages are naturally and teleologically organized”³ and he dedicated his life to study and further develop this concept. Others have also expanded on Erickson’s theory and applied it to a variety of contexts, two of which we will explore a bit later.

The Latin root from which “generativity” is derived is *genus*, or *generic*, meaning *to give birth*, or *of the same kind*.⁴ The very nature of this word suggests procreation, regeneration, reproduction, caring, creativity, sustaining, and energy. This active force spreads like yeast to encompass other generations with a transforming regenerative power, altering the gene pool of its community and contributing to fertility and growth. Biologist, Rupert Sheldrake, explains that the generative field of a living system extends into its environment and connects the two.⁵ Generativity is the result of generative actions and always involves some kind of “birthing”—creating new life that extends into the future.

Before we move further into defining generativity, it is important to take note of the difference between generative actions and generativity. There are many generative actions—we see them every day—but not all result in generativity. This is key! Take a garden for example; planting seeds is a generative action, but if the garden is neglected it may only produce a small crop, or will not produce at all. If disease attacks the garden the crop could be destroyed. Remember the parable about the farmer who scattered seeds? This was a generative action, but if you recall, only those seeds that fell on fertile soil

³ Dan P. McAdams, ed., *Generativity and Adult Development: How and Why We Care for the Next Generation* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998), 136.

⁴ Derivatives of these roots include *generate* - to produce; to cause to be. Also: *generation*, *regenerate* (to cause to be completely renewed; to give a new spiritual life to; to bring into existence again), *regeneration*, *regenerative*. [*genero*, *generare*, *generavi*, *generatus* - to beget; to produce]. *generative* - 1) having to do with production; 2) capable of producing.

⁵ Peter Senge et al., *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* (Cambridge, MA: SoL, 2004), 4.

produced crops; additionally, the harvest from the fertile soul yielded as much as one hundred times what the farmer planted (Mt 13:3-8)—*that is generativity!* Generative actions need constant attention, fertilization, and care to develop into generativity. We will come back to this parable a little later to discuss what prevents generativity from developing.

To help you further understand generative actions versus generativity, allow me to use a personal example. During a routine doctor visit at the end of my seventh month of pregnancy, my doctor informed me that he could not hear the baby's heartbeat; a subsequent ultrasound confirmed his diagnosis. I was devastated; this was my first pregnancy and I had taken good care of myself, prepared a nursery, and was looking forward to a future raising my child. Instead, I was admitted to the hospital for labor induction—and the baby was stillborn. Giving birth is a generative action, but in this example I was deprived of the opportunity to provide the care and nurturing required to bring the child to maturity, let alone to result in generativity.

Many individuals and organizations are involved in generative acts that may lead to generativity; however, these actions are often born from altruistic concerns to meet a need or provide humanitarian comfort on a one-time or limited basis. "Helping people in need out of altruistic regard for their suffering is of course admirable, but it is not generativity; a 'birth' must be involved."⁶ Following a birth, ongoing generative actions

⁶ McAdams, *Generativity and Adult Development*, 173.

must occur and, as Professor of Psychology John Kotre describes it, there must be a “concern for and commitment to future generations.”⁷

Another important point to note is the redemptive quality of generativity. Not all babies are birthed from generative actions; rape is an example. However, if the mother carries the child full term and that child grows up in a loving, nurturing home, the love and care that child receives can discount the violence and ugliness of their conception, and become a life based in generativity. This is why generativity is so essential for the Elder-at-the-Fire in discipling apprentices, not only for its reproductive capabilities, but also because of its redemptive nature.

Generativity Expanded

Generativity is a complex concept that encompasses all areas of life. It is a drive—a fertile, creative, compelling force that thrusts an individual into something beyond him- or herself, and contains experiences and lessons the generative individual has learned along the way. This then generates a historic narrative that feeds significance and meaning back into their life, as well as into the lives of those in their sphere of influence. The story of the old man alludes to this historic narrative. He must have had many experiences crossing the river at many different stages, some of those crossings most likely harrowing, but through his many crossings he accumulated valuable lessons that compelled him to build a bridge for succeeding generations. His fellow traveler did not see the significance of his efforts until the old man explained it to him. Narrative is an indispensable factor in the fruition of generativity, especially as it pertains to the Elder-at-

⁷ Barbara Engler, *Personality Theories: An Introduction*, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2014), 152.

the-Fire; narrative weaves together the Elder's life-wisdom with their generative concern and actions, and supplies the Elder with stories to share around the fire as they guide others on a pathway to hope and maturity.

Ed de St. Aubin and Don McAdams, professors of Human Development and Psychology, identified seven attributes of generativity that, when integrated with motivational sources, thoughts, and actions, have the ability to instill meaning into the life of the generative individual (i.e., Elder-at-the-Fire) as well as provide meaning to their generative concern (the next generation, i.e., apprentice). They created a graphic that illustrates the progression of these attributes in relation to generativity (Figure 2).

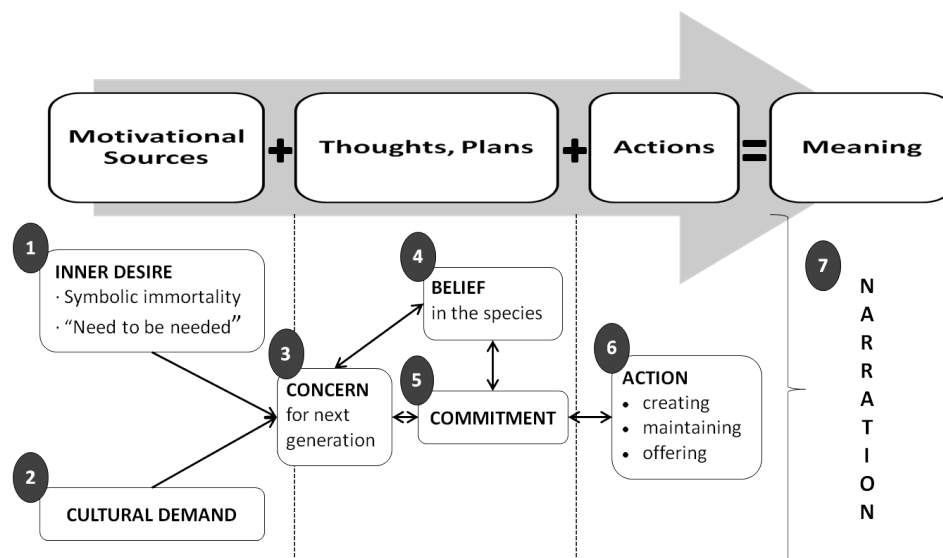


Figure 2 - Seven Features of Generativity⁸

To understand this image, note the direction the arrow at the top moves: from motivational sources to meaning. Under each heading the numbered boxes and arrows show the progression that brings the various elements of generativity together to form meaning.

⁸ McAdams, *Generativity and Adult Development*, 9. Chart adapted and revised from McAdams.

The path to generativity begins when the motivational sources (1) *inner desire* and (2) *cultural demand* collide to create a (3) *concern*. Frequently, the inner desire is related to one's desire to leave a legacy or, as indicated in the diagram, is generated from a need to be needed. When this inner desire responds to a cultural demand (e.g., help end poverty), it results in a concern, often referred to as a *generative concern*. For the Elder-at-the-Fire, this concern is the mandate to "make disciples." Remember, in generativity the concern always encompasses future generations, not just the present. When the generative concern is reinforced with an intrinsic or extrinsic (4) *belief* (thought) in something of vital importance, a (5) *generative commitment* (plan) is made to the concern and leads to a (6) *generative action* (behavior) in which an individual endeavors to add meaning. This meaning-making occurs through a (7) *narration of generativity*.

"All seven features of generativity are oriented around the overall goal—a goal that (ideally) the individual and society share—of *providing for the next generation* [author's emphasis] ... for the survival, well-being, and development of human life in succeeding generations."⁹ Keep in mind, a generative action that concludes with the action itself is not generativity. Motivational sources and generative thoughts, plans, and actions must be followed by meaning-giving. "Generative acts are given meaning in (7) *narration* [author's emphasis], and these meanings feed back to inform inner desire, cultural demand, conscious concern, belief, commitment, and later generative acts."¹⁰ Meaning-giving is essential to the purpose of generativity, to move it forward so future

⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

generations can also participate in generative acts, thus continuing the cycle of generativity.

Hopefully the *Seven Features of Generativity* diagram provides some clarity to the concept of generativity and serves to assist you in grasping its process. However, it is vital to understand that generativity is *not* merely steps to follow or a program to complete; it is an ongoing relational process. Generativity *always* extends itself into the future, and transcends the self as well as the generative act, without anticipation of reciprocity. Generativity is not only a concern for the next generation, but all future generations typified by extending love into the future without reciprocal expectations.¹¹

John Kotre, expanded generativity further by delineating it into four types: biological, parental, technical, and cultural (Table 2).¹² Each of these types affects a generative object through which the seven attributes of generativity are brought into play.

Table 1. Types of Generativity

Type	Description
1. Biological	Begetting, bearing, and nursing offspring. Generative object: the infant
2. Parental	Nurturing and disciplining offspring, initiating them into a family's tradition. Generative object: the child
3. Technical	Teaching skills—the “body” of a culture—to successors, implicitly passing on the symbol system in which the skills are embedded. Generative objects: the apprentice, the skill
4. Cultural	Creating, renovating, and conserving a symbol system—the

¹¹ Dr. C. George Boeree, “Personality Theories: Erik,” accessed November 22, 2004, <http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/erikson.html>.

¹² Kotre, *Outliving the Self*, 12.

	<p>“mind” of a culture—explicitly passing it on to successors.</p> <p>Generative objects: the disciple, the culture</p>
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However, neither Kotre’s types nor de St. Aubin’s and McAdams’ seven features of generativity sufficiently address generativity as it applies to individual Christians and the Church. Rukia Draw, a Mentoring Coordinator of the faith-based *Outreach Community Ministries* in Illinois, addresses the question of the Church’s role in transferring faith to the next generation and the importance generativity has in sustaining Christianity into a new generation. She claims:

Generativity will become an increasingly important term for the church because it is precisely where two of its central tasks meet: meaning making and caring for others. If Christians fail to do these two things well, they miss the very heart of their mission in the world. A church with an aborted mission cannot provide for the young the things they desire most according to psychosocial theory: security, belonging, and identity. Without the nurturing of future generations from the earliest of opportunities, Christianity will not remain a living religion and vital institution.¹³

This is precisely why there is crucial need for Elders-at-the-Fire, and the purpose of this book. Any form of generativity that does not lead to Christ is a counterfeit to the type of generativity Jesus’ life and ministry was all about— abundant life (Jn 10:10). A new type of generativity is of the essence; for that purpose, I have expanded on Erikson’s theory to include a spiritual element: *Missional Generativity*. This element is imperative in the Elder-at-the-Fire’s life and for discipling others to maturity.

¹³ Rukia Draw, “Generativity and Regeneration in Bushnellian Theology,” *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 101.

Impediments to Generativity

Inherent in each of Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development are two opposing emotional responses to the environment which must be brought into balance for healthy development prior to advancing to the next stage. For example, in infancy the contradictory responses "are a sense of trust and a sense of mistrust: their balance ... helps create the basis for the most essential overall outlook on life, namely, hope, which must be awakened by our primal, our maternal, our caretaker(s)."¹⁴ Each stage has specific tensions that, if not balanced, create maladaptations or lead to malignancies that are carried over into each succeeding stage. As tensions stabilize and resolve into balance, the individual is able to achieve a particular positive life outlook, which helps them navigate into the succeeding stages as they progress toward maturity. Erikson further explains the criticality of resolving these tensions prior to moving into the next developmental stage:

At every successive development stage, the individual is also increasingly engaged in the anticipation of tensions that have yet become focal and in reexperiencing those tensions that were inadequately integrated when they were focal; similarly engaged are those whose age-appropriate integration was then, but is no longer, adequate. ... At each successive stage, earlier conflicts must be resolved in relation to the current level of development.¹⁵

The opposing tension to generativity is self-absorption, and the outcome achieved when these responses become stable is care. The dominant tensions in the final stage (old age) is integrity versus despair, which leads to wisdom when these two are resolved.¹⁶ If

¹⁴ Erik H. Erikson, Joan M. Erikson, and Helen Q. Kivnick, *Vital Involvement in Old Age* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33-38.

generativity is not achieved, one does not earn the strength of wisdom and is therefore not qualified to be an elder to others. Likewise, if Missional Generativity is not achieved, a Christian is not ready for the role of Elder-at-the-Fire.

There are many things that can cause an individual to not adapt to their environment, such as: feelings of abandonment, abuse, loss of a parent or other significant care-taker, illness, mental or physical disabilities, catastrophes, and the list goes on. These things may occur at any developmental stage, and have the potential to revert the individual's progress, causing them to have to revisit earlier developmental conflicts that were previously in balance. The individual can learn to readapt; however, if the opposing tension(s) remain unbalanced, they could spiral into malignant tendencies that make it much harder for the individual to return to vitality and a healthy life perspective. When applying this within a Christian context, this explains how the disruptions and spiritual sickness of sin work to deter or prevent a Christian from progressing to full maturity in Christ.

The parable of the farmer planting seeds provides a metaphor for the influences in one's life that obstruct healthy spiritual development and rob the floundering Christian of a strong spiritual life outlook. The first seeds fell on the pathway and were eaten by birds; this could apply to spiritual infancy. If the newly born Christian is not discipled and nurtured, they become ripe pickings by those who would lure them back into their old life, swooping in to pluck them away. The next set of seeds fell on shallow, rocky soil and grew, but soon withered away because there was not enough soil for the roots to grow deep enough to receive the nutrition necessary for withstanding the elements. These seeds represent the adolescent stage of Christian maturity; they are quick to sprout and

have enthusiasm about spiritual things, but have not yet resolved a Christ-identity in their Christian walk. The next set of seeds represents what may be termed as the young adulthood stage of spiritual development; the basic conflict for this stage in Erikson's theory is between intimacy and isolation. This is a significant stage in moving from adolescence to young adulthood, and could represent a struggle to let go of the ways of the world in order to live in faithful commitment to Christ. These seeds fell onto thorny ground, and when the weeds grew and multiplied, they strangled the plants (Mt 13:3-8). This allegorical interpretation illustrates some of the obstacles that impair healthy spiritual formation. Although each individual is responsible for their own response to Christ, this parable sheds light on the type of discipleship needed to help them reach maturity and produce abundantly: sheltering, protecting, nurturing, nourishing, establishing a good root system, watering, weeding, and fertilization. An Elder-at-the-Fire uses their spiritual wisdom to organically help garden the soil and nurture the seeds as they germinate and grow.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he admonished the Church for their failure to move forward in their spiritual development, which caused them to be unable to adapt in the next phase of Christian development in which they should have been partaking of solid nourishment. This passage relates to those who should have been in the adolescent or young adulthood phases of Christian development:

My friends, you are acting like the people of this world. That's why I could not speak to you as spiritual people. You are like babies as far as your faith in Christ is concerned. So I had to treat you like babies and feed you milk. You could not take solid food, and you still cannot, because you are not yet spiritual. You are jealous and argue with each other. This proves that you are not spiritual and that you are acting like the people of this world (1 Cor 3:1-2 CEV).

In the book of Hebrews, the author speaks to Christians who had progressed in their faith, but who had begun to waver. They should have been mature, but did not adapt to the later stages of development and instead of maturity, they failed to adapt in generativity or wisdom and needed to revisit previous developmental phases:

All of you are slow to understand. By now you should have been teachers, but once again you need to be taught the simplest things about what God has said. You need milk instead of solid food. People who live on milk are like babies who don't really know what is right. Solid food is for mature people who have been trained to know right from wrong (Heb 5:11b-14 CEV).

The spiritual formation of an individual into Missional Generativity is vital in order to receive and accept the calling to Elder-at-the-Fire. Missional Generativity is not achieved at the moment of salvation or in spiritual infancy, nor in the adolescent or young adult stages of spiritual development; rather, it is to be worked out in the next phase (middle adulthood) as the Christian strengthens their walk and integrates all previous stages in order to establish the “care” required to lead future generations. Missional Generativity is only acquired by successfully mastering the preceding spiritual phases. Once this has occurred, the Christian is ready to begin a journey to assimilate Missional Generativity into their life and become an Elder-at-the-Fire.

Fire Starters:

1. Table 2 identifies the opposing tensions for each developmental stage and the corresponding adaptive strength vital for progressing from one stage to the next. As you review the chart, consider each stage and how it applies to your life:
 - a. At what stage of development do you currently perceive yourself to be at in a) your personal life, and b) your spiritual development?

- b. Do you feel there are unresolved tensions from a previous stage(s) that are hindering adaptation to your current life stage, either personal or spiritual?

Table 2 – Erikson’s Eights Stages of Development¹⁷

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis (tensions)	Vital Adaptive Strength
1	Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust	Hope
2	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Willpower, Determination
3	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose
4	Industriousness vs. Inferiority	Competence
5	Identity Cohesion vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity
6	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love
7	Generativity vs. Stagnation or Self-absorption	Care
8	Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom

2. Conduct a study of King David’s life and note the progressions of his life through the various stages. Pay particular attention to the instances where maladaptations influenced his life and how they were later resolved.

Pastors and Church Leaders:

3. Contemplate the ministries of your church. In what areas is true generativity occurring versus generative acts? Note any obvious impediments. Are there areas that are degenerative?

¹⁷ Ibid., 45. Chart adapted from Erikson’s chart Ages and Stages.

If you are interested in learning more about generativity, I recommend the following for further study:

- *Generativity and Adult Development: How and Why We Care for the Next Generation*, Dan P McAdams, ed., American Psychological Association, 1998.
- *Lives, Memories, Legacies, Stories: The Works of John Kotre*, <http://www.johnkotre.com/about.htm>. (Note: Kotre discusses a dark side to generativity. On this point I disagree with his writings, at least in terminology. I do not believe there is a dark side; generativity is *life* producing. I prefer the term 'degenerativity'.)
- *Personality Theories: An Introduction*, 9th ed. Barbara Engler, Wadsworth Publishing, 2014.
- *The Generative Society: Caring for Future Generations*, Ed de St. Aubin, American Psychological Association, 2004.
- *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review*, Erik H. Erikson. W. W. Norton & Co., 1983.
- *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, Erik H. Erikson, Joan M. Erikson, and Helen Q. Kivnick. W.W. Norton & Co., 1986.

Chapter 4

Sustaining Fire

*If we're going to impact our world in the name of Jesus,
it will be because people like you and me
took action in the power of the Spirit.
Ever since the mission and ministry of Jesus,
God has never stopped calling
for a movement of "Little Jesuses"
to follow him into the world and
unleash the remarkable redemptive genius
that lies in the very message we carry.*

—Alan Hirsch¹

Placeholder for Chapter 4

¹ Alan Hirsch and Darryn Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 24.

Chapter 5

Gathered at the Fire

*A narrative is like a room
on whose walls a number of false doors
have been painted;
while within the narrative,
we have many apparent choices of exit,
but when the author
leads us to one particular door,
we know it is the right one
because it opens.*

—John Updike¹

Placeholder for Chapter 5

¹ John Updike, *More Matter: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Fawcett Books, 2000), 183.

PART III

FEEDING THE FIRE

*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.
—Is 2:3*

*The Lord our God said to us ...
“You have stayed long enough at this mountain.
Break camp and advance.
See, I have given you this land.
Go in and take possession of the land
the Lord swore he would give
to your fathers
—to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—
and to their descendants after them.”*

—Dt 1:6-7a, 8

Chapter 6

Challenge to an Epic Adventure

*“Is not it time that your drifting was consecrated into pilgrimage?
You have a mission. You are needed.
The road that leads to nowhere
has to be abandoned. ...
It is a road for joyful pilgrim’s intent
on the recovery of passion.*

—Alan Jones¹

An Elder-at-the-Fire is one who answers the call to dwell in the presence of the Fire, and embarks upon a pilgrimage to Missional Generativity. This calling is a deep, burning passion to invest long-term in another’s life by passing on spiritual wisdom and truth; in essence, to serve as a spiritual sage. The path to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire is not an easy road and is fraught with obstacles, disappointments, peril, and insecurities; the cost may seem high to the traveler, but the rewards are great. The pilgrimage of an Elder-at-the-Fire is an act of initiation and apprenticeship, not a journey to a specific arrival point, and, once navigated, the pilgrim returns home to guide others to the Missional Generativity and the role of Elder-at-the-Fire.

The Path to Elder-at-the-Fire

In a day and age that lacks Elders to guide the way, how does one become an Elder-at-the-Fire? The problem is not that there are no wisdom people within the Christian community to serve in this capacity; the lack is in their use or grooming of

¹ Alan W. Jones, *Passion for Pilgrimage: Notes for the Journey Home* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 1999), 1.

would-be Elders. This book's intent is to make others aware of that need and ignite a desire to serve in this capacity. So, again, the question remains, without someone to guide the way, what is the pathway to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire?

The journey this book proposes is a pilgrimage; an epic adventure to developing Missional Generativity in preparation for becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire—a pilgrim guide for others on their spiritual quest to Christian maturity and wisdom. In this sense, the pilgrimage serves a dual purpose: to develop Missional Generativity and to return from the pilgrimage as an Elder-at-the-Fire.

Life is a journey, and along life's trails are many crossroads and alternate paths. Too often, people are afraid to diverge from their course or embark upon new journeys; some are complacent and content to stay where they are on the road, letting life pass by, while others haphazardly charge down any trail with no regard to the dangers or temptations that await them. We are all travelers on a road, but travelers need road maps, or guides to blaze the way who understand how to recognize potential hazards and pitfalls that may lie ahead. This is what the Elder-at-the-Fire does.

If you are still reading the book at this point, then you probably feel an awakening or a nudging in your spirit to be a spiritual guide for the next generations. You are concerned about the future of the Church and whether today's upcoming leaders are ready for the challenges they may face in our ever-changing culture. You have been involved in ministry at some level and have walked through many trials of life, learning in these hardships how to rely on Christ and apply biblical principles, which have helped bring you to a measure of spiritual maturity. Yet, there is an aching need to pass on your hard-earned wisdom, and you believe you have something to offer to emerging Christian

leaders. You are ready to accept a calling to Elder-at-the-Fire; you are ready to begin the journey—a pilgrimage to Missional Generativity.

Pilgrimage

The term ‘pilgrimage’ is drawn from the Latin root *peragrar*, meaning to cover or travel a distance and *perigrinus*, meaning ‘stranger,’ or ‘foreigner.’² To pilgrimage is sojourn through an unfamiliar territory or foreign land. *Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary* defines pilgrim as a wayfarer; a wanderer; a traveler; a stranger; one who travels far, or in strange lands, to visit some holy place or shrine as a devotee. In essence, the Christian life is a pilgrimage: “We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors” (1 Chr 29:15a).

Throughout the ages, extending back through biblical times, pilgrimage has played an important role in nearly all religions and cultures as a spiritual practice. There are various reasons people embark on a pilgrimage, including: a search for meaning or significance, spiritual deliverance, spiritual growth (sometimes in a specific area of the individual’s life), enlightenment, penance, to receive physical or spiritual healing, to find oneself and the answers to life, to accompany another pilgrim, or for the adventure. Ultimately, even for those who seek adventure or who are commanded to serve penance, the rigorous journey and time of reflection is an exercise in transformation; otherwise,

² “Jesus Living in Mary,” Eternal Word Television Network, 1998, accessed January 14, 2015, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/Montfort/Handbook/Pilgrim.htm>; “Pilgrimage,” Medieval Life and Times, accessed January 14, 2016, <http://www.medieval-life-and-times.info/medieval-religion/pilgrimage.htm>; *WordSense.eu Dictionary*, s.v. “Peragro,” accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.wordsense.eu/peragrar/>.

they are no more than tourists. “The journey to become a pilgrim means becoming a stranger in the service of transformation.”³

Biblical themes of pilgrimage abound in the scriptures. Each account holds specific significance within the missiogenepic story and all share commonalities that point to a central theme of salvation, restoration, and redemption. God set apart Abraham to become the father of a nation, but in order for Abraham to give birth to a nation he first had to leave his ancestral home and begin a long nomadic journey to Canaan, an unknown land. Noah was charged with building an ark; once the ark was completed Noah and his family boarded the ark and left behind the only home they had known; in fact, it was completely destroyed and they could never return. Cooped up on a rolling boat full of animals, Noah and his family were unable to put their feet on solid ground until the ark came to rest and the waters receded. In the Exodus pilgrimage account, Moses led the Israelites out of captivity from Egypt. Having left their homes behind, they wandered for forty years in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land. In each of these accounts, the pilgrimage required that they leave their homes and travel over a long period of time in an unknown land. However, they all did this in faith, believing in God’s promises, and “these were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised” (Heb 11:39).

Jesus’ life is the prime example of pilgrimage: leaving his heavenly home, he walked for thirty-three years in a foreign land, but his purpose was to show the Way to an

³ Christine Valters Paintner, *The Soul of a Pilgrim: Eight Practices for the Journey Within* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2015), 2.

eternal home. “To some extent, all Christian pilgrimage is also an identification with Christ in his final journey to the cross.”⁴

Why a Pilgrimage?

Most callings in life require some kind of journey; to be a doctor one must spend years studying the human body, how it works, the effects of disease on the body, medications and methods that produce healing, and interning under the direction of seasoned doctors before being credentialed to practice. Most of us would not want to be treated by a physician without the knowledge and experience required to properly diagnose and heal our ailments, particularly for surgery! This is also true for an Elder-at-the-Fire, and vital in developing Missional Generativity.

How does one become an Elder-at-the-Fire if there are few or no wisdom guides to lead the way? What journey leads to becoming an Elder-at-the-Fire? Due to a lack of apparent wisdom guides to mentor and lead others into that role, the Elder-at-the-Fire must find their own path, and must therefore embark on a sacred journey in order to return to the fire to guide and mentor others. A pilgrimage is more than a journey; it is a sacred training expedition with hills and valleys, straight thoroughfares and winding pathways. There are few comforts along the way, and at times the journey is arduous and filled with peril. At times the traveler will be in the company of other pilgrims who can learn from each other as they share together the stories of lessons learned while on the journey. “A pilgrimage is an intentional journey into this experience of unknowing and

⁴ Martin Robinson, *Sacred Places, Pilgrim Paths: An Anthology of Pilgrimage* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1997), 2.

discomfort for the sake of stripping away preconceived expectations.”⁵ For Christians, a pilgrimage is not about self-actualization, but rather to find oneself in the image of God, in order to become Jesus, the Word made flesh, to those who are within their circle of influence. “Pilgrimage is an outer journey that serves our inner transformation.”⁶

In Chapter 3 we learned that the opposing tension to generativity is self-absorption or stagnation; to progress to wisdom, these tensions must be brought into balance (along with all previous tensions). One of the reasons individuals fail or struggle to reach maturity in Christ is because they come to a point when the practice of Christian living becomes familiar and there is a tendency to rest in this place of comfort. A river without movement stagnates and no longer has the ability to provide life-giving support to its environment; similarly, the Christian who becomes complacent loses their effectiveness in being a life-giving source to the world. Embarking on a pilgrimage is the way to counteract this problem and resolve this conflict. “If you aren’t on a pilgrimage, you’re a settler, and one problem with the modern church is that it loved to settle.”⁷ It is all too easy for an individual to point out the barriers and make excuses for staying at home, for settling, rather than to enter into the unknown territory of a pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage was a prevalent practice in medieval times and, as widespread as was the custom, so too were the barriers that many faced and which prevented many from making the spiritual trek. Some of the obstacles were of a personal nature, others were legal or due to political or other environmental circumstances, for some it was because they were poor and believed they could not afford the journey or due to their social

⁵ Paintner, *Soul of a Pilgrim*, 2.

⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁷ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 72.

standing in the community, yet others needed permission from an employer, king, or other person of authority—particularly women whose permission was required by their husband. There were also barriers related to familial obligations, crops to care for, and at times political or regional conflicts. In other cases, the barriers were health- or age-related.⁸ “Finally, the goal itself could set up a barrier to pilgrims. . . . but not all barriers to pilgrimage were matters beyond a would-be pilgrim’s control. Sometimes the biggest obstacle seems to have been the problem of lukewarm faith.”⁹ However, to acquire a life characterized by Missional Generativity—the qualification for being an Elder-at-the-Fire—the fear of barriers must be overcome and the pilgrimage endured; the spiritual outcomes will be well worth the effort!

The goal of pilgrimage is not a pleasure trip to a specific destination; rather, its purpose is for spiritual growth, introspection, and illumination. “Pilgrimage calls us to be attentive to the divine at work in our lives through deep listening, patience, opening ourselves to the gifts that arise in the midst of discomfort, and going out to our own inner wild edges to explore new frontiers.”¹⁰ Although you may not engage in a physical pilgrimage, the principles and practices of internal pilgrimages are the same.

Pilgrimage Practices

Making a commitment to pilgrimage requires planning. Whether taking an actual journey through a foreign land or engaging in the internal process of pilgrimage,

⁸ Larissa Taylor, ed., “Barriers to Pilgrimage,” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 40-42.

⁹ Ibid., 41-42.

¹⁰ Paintner, *Soul of a Pilgrim*, 4.

preparation is always important. As with any journey, one must ensure that the affairs of their home are cared for while they are away. For those who make an actual physical journey, this means taking care of financial obligations, care of the home and family, obtaining permission for absences from work, and so on. These same duties can metaphorically be applied to the work done in an internal pilgrimage.

In addition to settling affairs comes the task of packing for the journey. Pilgrims need to pack light to reduce their burden for the long walk; otherwise objects will need to be discarded along the way. The pilgrim's attire must be practical so as not to become cumbersome, and sturdy walking shoes are well advised. Keeping in mind the changing seasons is also important in determining what to pack. In packing for the journey to Missional Generativity, the suitcase must include the scriptures and a covering of prayer. "On a pilgrimage ... we take a journey to encounter the sacred within ourselves in a more intimate way. We prepare ... with prayer and take only the essential tools."¹¹

One of the most important practices prior to setting off on a pilgrimage is the intentional act of making a vow. A vow is a solemn pledge or contract, characterized by a commitment or promise to carry out certain deeds for a specific outcome. A covenant of such kind is not taken lightly by God, nor should it be taken lightly by the one making the vow. The traveler may encounter many threats along the way; some of the greatest perils are for the pilgrim to lose their way, give in to despair, look for shortcuts, or quit the journey; the vow will help them stay the course. A covenant can be a powerful motivator, and a deterrent to ending the journey prematurely.

¹¹ Ibid., 15.

Finally, the pilgrim is ready for the road, but is now faced with the oft times wrenching act of letting go—the traveler must leave behind anything that weighs him or her down. “The pilgrim leaves his home. He is ready to forgo his familiar horizon; he extricates himself from habit, which so easily becomes routine and servitude. He goes off to an ‘elsewhere,’ an unusual and ‘extra-ordinary,’ place, the Other. ‘Elsewhere! Elsewhere is the Kingdom of God, peace!’”¹² The practice of releasing the things that can hold one back is a basic pilgrimage principal, as in the examples of Abraham, Noah, and Moses. To be ready to accept the sacred into our lives, we must make space to meet the eternal.

Along the pilgrim pathway there are sacred spaces and places to visit, some of architectural beauty, others comprised only of nature’s beauty, and even those found in the circle of *communitas*. Many pilgrims practice fasting as they approach sacred spaces or places in order to tune out worldly distractions and be more open to allowing the Eternal’s working in their life. Remembering these places and their significance in this sacred journey is also important for the pilgrim. “As part of the journey, pilgrims pick up keepsakes charged with historical and missional resonance. These are called relics. ... We all need fragments from the road made sacred by memory and sacrifice. These relics are sources of ongoing identity, living testimony to how the pilgrim path has changed us and is changing us.”¹³

Recalling the spiritual pathway is a vital part of pilgrimage, not only for oneself but also in recounting their spiritual progress to others along the way and to their friends

¹² Robinson, *Sacred Places*, 29.

¹³ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 88-89.

and loved ones upon their return. The pilgrim narrative can be captured in many ways, through art, diaries or journals, story, poems, or song; these narratives can serve as pilgrim guides to others who may follow the pathway later. The narratives can describe pitfalls and dangers, places of respite, people and establishments that are willing to offer hospitality along the way, encouragement to continue on the journey, humorous antidotes, insights, practical tips on how to make the journey, instructions on how to navigate crossings or survive the elements, personal account of how the journey affects your life, and so much more. This practice becomes a powerful source of comfort and strength to the pilgrim and a testimonial of endurance, perseverance, and triumph.

The final practice of pilgrimage, and perhaps the one of most import, is the return home. Sometimes the return results in the start of a new pilgrimage; we saw that example in the life of Elijah. All pilgrimages, however, involve a homecoming. The return home may be just as arduous as the pilgrimage itself, but the perils and struggles are easier to manage because the wanderer has learned the path and knows which pitfalls to look for. Additionally, the pilgrim is returning with new purpose. “Journeys bring us home fitter, with clearer minds and more cosmopolitan perspectives, with windows that make us look at life through the squint of self-honesty and humility, better equipped for a journey with God.”¹⁴

The return is also essential for relating the experiences, hardships, triumphs, and lessons learned to others, especially to those preparing to embark on their own pilgrimage. However, “the pilgrim returns home not with all the answers. Instead, they receive better questions; questions that bring the pilgrimage experience into daily life and

¹⁴ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 88.

reveal depth in all they see around them. ... we always return bearing gifts for the community.”¹⁵ The gifts the Elder-at-the-Fire brings back are wisdom and a life dedicated to apprenticing others to healing, wholeness, and Missional Generativity.

Invitation to an Epic Adventure

The next chapter offers a variety of pilgrimage practices interwoven with inspirational quotes, scriptures, activities, and contemplative exercises. There are no time expectations or limits for completing your journey—the amount of effort and your level of commitment is entirely between you and your commitment before God.

Are you ready for the journey? Do you want to live a life characterized by Missional Generativity? Have you felt a nudging of calling to become an Elder-at-the-Fire? Do you want to be an illuminating, life-giving fire to others? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then I invite you to turn the page and embark on a pilgrimage to Missional Generativity.

*“A quest ... is never a matter of one’s own desire
but rather of one’s calling.”*

—Ralph C. Wood¹⁶

¹⁵ Paintner, *Soul of a Pilgrim*, 126.

¹⁶ Ralph C. Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-Earth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 45.

Chapter 7

Pilgrimage to Missional Generativity

*To journey without being changed is to be a nomad.
To change without journeying is to be a chameleon.
To journey and to be transformed by the
journey is to be a pilgrim.*

—Mark Nepo¹

Placeholder for Chapter 7

¹ Mark Nepo, *The Book of Awakening: Having the Life You Want by Being Present to the Life You Have*, deluxe, gift ed. (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 2011), 34.

CONCLUSION

Fire Dance

*Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance,
and one of teaching's great rewards in the daily chance
it gives us to get back on the dance floor.*

*It is the dance of spiraling generations,
in which the old empower the young with their experience
and the young empower the old with new life,
reweaving the fabric of human community
as they touch and turn.*

—Parker Palmer

Placeholder for Conclusion

Chapter 8

Fire Dance

Place holder for Chapter 8

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