Bernard M. Spooner, Ph.D., General Editor

Christian Education Leadership

Making Disciples in the 21st Century Church



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Making Disciples in the Twenty-First-Century Church
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This book is dedicated to
Pat,
my college sweetheart, wife, and friend,
who not only has given her life to teaching children
in the public schools and in Sunday School,
but who also has personally discipled
our two daughters and four grandchildren.
I am proud of her significant contribution
to my life, to our family, and to all whom she has touched.

—Bernard M. Spooner

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Introduction

BERNARD M. SPOONER, PH.D.

My early concept of Christian education came from pastors, key lay leaders, and seminary professors along with intensive experience as a volunteer leader; however, theologian Dr. James Smart influenced my understanding of its critical importance for believers. In my view, what is needed in Christian education today is the same as what Dr. Smart wrote about in 1954 in his book *The Teaching Ministry of the Church.* Dr. Smart placed a clear focus on seven elements, and those elements led to the idea of this book. They include

- teaching Scripture,[1]
- ensuring a balance between preaching and teaching in the church,[2]
- teaching the priesthood of all believers,[3]
- providing education for all age groups,[4]
- including the whole church in the education process,[5]
- involving the family in the home,[6] and
- helping the congregation see itself as "on mission" rather than as a local body alone.[7]

This current, comprehensive volume is designed for church leaders, professors, and students. It can serve as a guide for thinking through, developing, and/or evaluating a balanced ministry for all ages within a congregation. Writers have been selected based on their academic credentials, expertise, and practical experience in their assigned areas.

Why Churches and Christian Leaders Need this Book Now

This book was developed to help churches and Christian leaders follow the Great Commission and develop twenty-first-century disciples through updated, research-based, comprehensive information.

Today there is an urgent need for quality biblical discipleship in both emerging and traditional congregations. At best, discipleship begins with quality Christian education, which includes involvement in ongoing ministry. For the individual it continues with lifelong learning, service, and growth as a disciple of Christ.

Newer churches can benefit from current best practices specific to all age groups and types of education ministries. For example, this book can be used to help leaders determine the appropriate sizes for teaching groups, the workers and teachers needed for groups. It may also serve as a "how-to" guide for effective discipleship ministry.

Older congregations can use this resource to evaluate their current discipleship ministry. In addition, the book can be used as a guide to plan and renew a discipleship ministry.

The latest comprehensive "how-to" book of this nature was published in 1996.[8] Three other resources have recently been published, including one in 2000[9], another in 2002[10]; and the third in 2003[11]; however, none are as thorough as this resource, which provides detailed guidelines for age groups, for leadership development, and some other basic subjects needed by professors, students, and church leaders.

The content of this book includes age specific research-based information related to spiritual formation along with useful information for unique but important areas such as small group ministry and ministry with persons of special needs. Here are a few examples:

- This book includes individual chapters that are specific to the *spiritual formation* of each age group—birth through adult.
- *Small groups* are addressed and evaluated for all age groups, including home groups as appropriate.
- An entire chapter is devoted to *persons with special needs.*

Changing State of Christian Education in the Church

Much is changing in local church Christian education; however, solid discipleship in churches is no less important today than it was in early New Testament churches. The faithfulness of Jesus' early disciples and believers

over the centuries has ensured that we, too, continue to learn of Him and come to faith. Today there is great emphasis on congregational worship, and certainly worship is central to all a church does. However, many congregations seem to give little focus to discipling and preparing church members for significant roles of service in the congregation, society, or ministry around the world.

While current Christian education approaches are growing more and more diverse, it is unclear if the essential purposes of the church, as given in Scripture, are being fully honored in many congregations. The intent of this book is to be faithful to the biblical concepts of discipleship. The elements given by Dr. Smart as outlined in the first paragraph of this introduction will help do just that. *An entire chapter on ministry design is provided.*

Church leaders need to be intentional in developing and continually improving discipleship ministries. To do so, biblical discipleship must be central to Christian education and to discipling new believers. Jesus made clear that we are to "go and teach" (Matthew 28:18—20). As a result, church leaders must do more than "maintain a school." Instead, disciples must be empowered to take the message of Christ into their homes, schools, and work places.

It is important that Christian education leaders, including pastors, recognize and *view missions as a normal outgrowth and activity of discipleship ministry.* Two chapters have been included to help leaders address this crucial imperative for all believers. While more churches seem to be doing mission projects locally, nationally, and internationally, many churches have eliminated their mission education programs. This is unfortunate because both mission education and mission involvement are needed to help the young and old understand the biblical mandate to be on mission for Christ. A focus on missions should be integrated in all ministries of the church, including Bible study ministries and worship. Likewise, the church must provide opportunities for "calling out" those who will lead in mission work.

Decline in Role of Lay Persons

An urgent need exists for renewal in both equipping and involving lay persons in all that the church does.

Problem: *Many church leaders openly state that their church is "staff led" and do little to involve church members in planning or decision making.*

The implication is that lay persons are in the congregation to help the pastor and staff with their ministries as staff leaders.

Is not the opposite true? Are not the staff members there to equip and deploy all believers in the ministry of Christ? (See Ephesians 4:11–12.)

Solution: *Pastors and staff members must come to understand that the highest motivation and creativity of the laity come through broad involvement in planning and doing ministry within and beyond the church.* The church does not need to pay someone to do the work Christ intended for *all* of His people to do. Lay members want to be involved in *significant work* in the church, and Christian education is a primary vehicle for giving all believers a base for ministry within and beyond the church.

A broad base of members and lay leaders stand ready to do their part. George Barna reports that less than one in five (19%) donate some time weekly through their church, an eight percent drop over the last twenty years.[12] As a result, lay persons must be given the opportunity to grasp the needs and possibilities for the church just as pastors and staff members do.

Christian Education Is for All Sizes of Churches

Resources may be different, but the mission of Christ is the same for all churches. In the early New Testament church, equipping was done in homes in small groups. The setting may not have always been ideal, but the urgency of discipleship called for using such settings. Furthermore, the home was then, and should be now, a place for learning and doing what disciples are to do. The purposes of the church will be discussed more in several places in this book. Over the years many churches have used four basic purposes, elements, or functions to ensure balance in their ministries. They include

- evangelism or witness,
- worship,
- educate or equip, and
- ministry.

Some add “fellowship” to this list, while others consider “fellowship” as a description related to the other four elements or functions.

In his book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren gives a similar list with several variations.[13] As mentioned earlier, church leaders of larger churches today put great focus on worship and rightly so; however, many

could do a much better job of providing and carrying out quality Christian education for all age groups. Leaders of smaller churches sometimes feel that they cannot do everything and may leave out some very important elements the church needs to be doing. There is a need for all sizes and kinds of congregations to earnestly seek and be driven by the Great Commission of Christ. This will ensure that the church will be as Jesus intended.

Plan for This Volume

The book is designed to provide a solid biblical, theological, and historical basis for developing disciples. Although the original plan was to have eight or nine chapters, it became clear in time that more than twenty chapters were needed. This made it possible to include separate chapters for the various age-group ministries, including chapters for collegiate and single adults, along with additional useful guidance for practitioners. Chapters are provided for such important areas as understanding the context for ministry and spiritual formation for all ages. In addition, separate chapters are included related to ministry design, missions beyond the church, mission education in the church, outreach and evangelism, servant leadership, volunteer development, mentorship of leaders, and the minister's family and spiritual life. Finally, an important chapter is included on anticipating the future. Appendices include Sunday School and small groups worksheets for analysis of growth and improvement, as well as adult Bible study group job descriptions.

Each writer was carefully selected to ensure that the very latest, research-based information was provided. All writers are proven leaders, have significant expertise in their assigned areas, are fully aware of current developments in their focus areas, and are teachers or leaders in their areas of expertise. In addition, the authors are active in their churches and in demand as speakers and conference leaders. Although the book includes guidelines that are specific to Baptist churches and is written mainly by Baptist authors, a large majority of the book's research findings and recommendations will be useful to churches of many denominations.

Conclusion

Christian education is primarily a means of "making disciples…and teaching them." Beyond teaching, however, Christian leaders are to deploy disciples

to “go and make disciples of all nations.” Many churches need to move from a school mentality to a disciple-making state of mind. Our assumption is that the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18—19) is not optional for Christian churches. Rather, Christian education ministry is necessary for ongoing discipleship of both new and longtime believers and for equipping the local church to be a vibrant mission force in the community and around the world. Our hope is that this book will assist current and future leaders in moving their churches forward through effective Christian education ministry in this new century.

Christ has a future for His church today as He did when He presented the Great Commission to his early disciples. Furthermore, our Lord promised to be with us in this important task. As a result, this generation of leaders must take seriously the supreme task to “…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” (Matt. 28:18—20, NIV84).

PART 1:
Why Make Disciples?



Chapter 1



EXTENDING THE KINGDOM: THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE CHURCH

James C. Denison, Ph.D.

Every new idea that has ever burst upon the world has had a watchword. Always there has been some word or phrase in which the very genius of the thing has been concentrated and focused, some word or phrase to blazon on its banners when it went marching out into the world. Islam had a watchword: "God is God, and Mohammed is his prophet." The French Revolution had a watchword: "Liberty, equality, fraternity." The democratic idea had a watchword: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." …. Every new idea that has stirred the hearts of men has created its own watchword, something to wave like a flag, to rally the ranks and win recruits. Now the greatest idea that has ever been born upon the earth is the Christian idea. And Christianity came with a watchword, magnificent and mighty and imperial; and the watchword was "The Kingdom of God."[14]
The Gospel of Mark introduces the ministry of Jesus with this message: "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15, NIV84).[15] Matthew records Jesus' first preaching in the same way: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17).

Here we discover the central theme of our Lord's ministry and of the Scriptures: the kingdom of God. When we understand this focus, we will

understand the biblical and theological basis for Christian education in the church today.

What Is the Mission of the Church?

The scene is one of the most dramatic in all of God's word. The Galilean carpenter stood on a massive outcropping of rock, 1,150 feet above sea level, dwarfed by the gigantic cave behind him.

Just a short distance away stood a brilliant white marble temple built to the worship of Caesar—hence the name of the place, Caesarea. Nearby was the cavern where the Greeks said their god Pan was born. In Jesus' day, the cave led to a shaft that bored so deeply into the earth its depths were never discovered. The ancients called it the "gates of the underworld" or the "gates of Hades."

Scattered around the hilly countryside were fourteen temples to Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility. Nearby was one of the origins of the Jordan River, the holiest river to His own people, the Jews.

In the midst of such religious traditions and fervor, surrounded by every kind of god known to his culture, Jesus asked His followers, "Who do you say I am?" One of them declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And the Carpenter responded: "On this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:13—18a). Here we encounter the first occurrence of "church" *(ekklesia)* in the New Testament.

Then, pointing to the massive cavern behind him, Jesus added, "and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18b). A literal translation would read, "and the gates of Hades will not withstand its assault."

From her inception, the church has existed to assault the gates of Hades, taking the gospel to the lost world. Central to this calling is the concept of the kingdom of God.

The Old Testament exalts the King. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, God is consistently viewed as a King. The Jewish people could sing: "The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity" (Psalm 93:1–2).

Moses taught his people that "the LORD will reign for ever and ever" (Exodus 15:18). At the end of his life, he again proclaimed God to be the King of Israel: "He was king over Jeshurun [a symbolic name for Israel] when the leaders of the people assembled, along with the tribes of Israel"

(Deuteronomy 33:5). The Lord himself announced his rule over the nation: “I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator, your King” (Isaiah 43:15).

He is King not only of the nation but of the nations: “you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth” (2 Kings 19:15). When Messiah comes, “of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (Isa. 9:7).

Jesus fulfills the kingdom. Jesus began his earthly ministry by claiming to be this Messiah (Luke 4:21; Isa. 61:1–2). He said of himself, “If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28).

He taught his followers to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). He instructed us to live by this priority: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33).

When he returns, Jesus will consummate the kingdom: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory” (Matt. 25:31). At that time, “on his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16). Revelation predicts his glorious rule: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

The church extends the kingdom. After his resurrection, Jesus was asked by his expectant disciples, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). He answered them with his last words before returning to heaven: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The church exists to extend the kingdom of God as Jesus’ witnesses, beginning where we are and going to everyone on Earth. The call of God to his people has always been to lead others to make him their King. The biblical creation stories testify that God is the creating King. The history of Israel shows that he is the ruling King. The law and wisdom sections of the Hebrew Bible taught the Jews how to live in his kingdom. The prophetic books called the people to serve God as their King while awaiting his Messiah to bring that kingdom to Earth.

The Gospels are witness to Christ as the Messiah, the present King. Acts tells the story of the spread of the kingdom. The epistles call the church to faithful life in the kingdom. And Revelation portrays the coming and eternal kingdom of God.

God's kingdom comes wherever his will is done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). If God is your King, he is the ruler of every dimension of your life. He is King of the clothes you're wearing and the air you're breathing. He is King of what you do in private, not just in public. He is King of the money you keep, not just what you give through the church.

The church exists to lead people to make God their King and serve in his kingdom. How does this calling relate to Christian education?

Why Make Disciples?

In the Hebrew tradition, a *talmid* ("student," see 1 Chronicles 25:8) was committed to a rabbi as his teacher and mentor (see Matt. 23:7—8). In the New Testament, a "disciple" *(mathetes)* was an apprentice, student, or follower. The Scriptures describe disciples of Moses (John 9:28), the Pharisees (Matt. 22:16), and John the Baptist (Mark 2:18) as well as Jesus.

Rabbinic students selected their teacher, but Jesus selected his disciples (Mark 1:16—20). He called them to leave everything for him: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). He then commissioned his disciples to "make disciples of all nations" by "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" (Matt. 28:19—20a).

Here we discover the foundational reason for Christian education in the church: to teach converts to obey the commands of Christ so they can extend the kingdom of God.

"Teaching" is one of the gifts and callings of the Spirit (Romans 12:6). Paul was given this gift and ministry: "of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher" (2 Timothy 1:11); "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers," Saul among them (Acts 13:1).

The primary role of those with this gift is to equip Christians for ministry in the kingdom: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's 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" (Ephesians 4:11—13).

As teachers of God's word, we partner with the Holy Spirit, who has been sent to "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). We teach by his inspiration and with his help: "This is what we teach, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (1 Corinthians 2:13).

Ephesians 4:11–12 is a key text for understanding discipleship. Compare these translations:

- "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, [12] to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (NIV 84).
- "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (ESV).
- "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; [12]For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (KJV).

Note the first comma in the King James Version of verse 12. With it in place, the job of spiritual leaders is to equip the saints, to do the work of the ministry, and to build up the body of Christ. With the comma removed (as it should be, according to scholars), the job of leaders is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. See the difference?

We will be held accountable by God for what we teach: "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). As a result, "not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1).

Teaching people "to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20) is one of the primary ways Jesus extends his kingdom through the church. Paul instructed Timothy to teach those who would teach others: "The

things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2).

The kingdom grows through multiplication, not addition. If I were to win one person to Christ every day until retiring at age sixty-five, some 4,380 people would be added to the kingdom. But suppose I were to win you to Christ today and teach you the essentials of the faith so that you could lead someone else to the Lord. Then tomorrow we each won and discipled one; the next day, the four of us each won and discipled one; the next day, the eight of us each won and discipled one, and so on. How long would it take to win the world to Jesus?

Thirty-three days. By that time there would be 8,589,934,592 believers, 1.5 billion more than the planet's current population.

We make disciples to extend the kingdom of God by teaching people to live for Jesus as their King and to share their faith with others. In this way, the ministry of Christian education is central to the kingdom mission of the church.

What Hinders Disciple-Making? Lessons from Church History

Unfortunately, this holistic worldview was not to last long in Christian history.

Three concepts would soon arise to threaten the centrality of Christian education for all believers: the clergy, the monastery, and the institutional church.

Christians in the apostolic era understood that every believer is gifted for ministry and that every gift is valuable in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12—27). When the Christian movement began to spread outside its Jewish context, however, it quickly encountered the paganism of the Roman Empire. Converts came into the church with little or no theological background. Concerns arose regarding the doctrinal purity of the faith.

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, argued for the authority of the bishop over the church[16] and a "college" of bishops as the ruling authority of the universal church.[17] Irenaeus further identified the Roman Church as the "preeminent authority" in Christendom, with her leaders emanating from Peter and Paul through the bishops who have succeeded them.[18]

Soon (about 250 AD) Cyprian of Carthage had separated the "clergy" from the "laity" and made his famous claim, "He can no longer have God for

his Father, who has not the Church for his mother."[19] When Constantine made his conversion to Christianity in 312 and subsequently legalized the church, the institutional authority of the Christian movement was clearly defined as the Roman Church and her leadership.

Of course, this concept of ecclesiastical authority molded greatly the patristic and medieval concepts of scriptural authority. As God gave the Scriptures through the church, so (it was argued) he guided the church through her leaders to the proper interpretation and application of his word. Creeds, councils, and papal rulings became the means by which the biblical materials were understood and transmitted.[20] Education was reserved primarily for the monasteries, where clerics studied Scripture and theology to instruct other clerics. And the teaching ministry of the church as God's strategy for equipping all Christians for kingdom service was lost.

Protestant reformers sought to relocate authority with the Scriptures as they are interpreted by the individual believer. Martin Luther made his famous claim, "Only the Holy Scripture possesses canonical authority."[21] He discounted in turn the claims of magistrates, church councils, church fathers, bishops, and even the pope to authority over the Scriptures.[22] John Calvin agreed: "God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us only in the Scriptures";[23] "Scripture has its authority from God, not from the church."[24]

In this view, the teaching function of the church became significant once again as a means of instructing God's people in his word and ways. However, in this modern era, as churches and denominations grew along with the cities and industries that fueled their expansion, success was defined institutionally. Ministers were expected to do the ministry while members paid ministers' salaries and supported their work. Christian education was important for instructing believers in the faith, but most churches did not expand its focus to equip Christians for larger kingdom ministry.

It is vital that churches return to the apostolic model of equipping all God's people for works of service (Eph. 4:11—13). Imagine a football team where only the coach touched the ball, or a company where only the president talked with customers, or a hospital where only the CEO saw patients. This is unfortunately the way many churches function today.

The only way we will reach our culture with the gospel is for all Christians to use their influence to share the gospel. They can do so only if the church equips them to use their gifts and resources for the kingdom.

How Do We Make Disciples in America? The Postmodern Challenge

Religious trends in the Western world are not encouraging. According to the latest American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), the number of Americans who describe themselves as “Christian” has dropped from 86% to 76% since 1990. At the same time, the number who say they have “no religion” has nearly doubled to more than 15%. The number who call themselves “atheist” or “agnostic” has quadrupled and is now almost twice the number of Episcopalians in our country.[25]

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life recently released their “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey.” The survey reports that more than one-quarter of American adults (28%) have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion, or no religion at all. Among Americans ages eighteen to twenty-nine, one in four say they are not affiliated with any religion.[26]

Spiritual trends in Europe are even more troubling. Harris Interactive conducted a large survey of religious beliefs on the Continent. Its results: in Italy, 62% say they believe in “any form of God or any type of supreme being"; in Spain, 48% of the population agrees; in Germany, 41% affirm the existence of “God"; 35% in England and 27% in France concur.[27]

In Great Britain today, four times as many Muslims attend mosque on Friday as Christians attend worship on Sunday. Twenty-five percent of Brussels is Muslim. Fifty-four million Muslims live in Europe; their numbers will continue to increase due to immigration and high birth rates.

Why is Christianity in decline across much of the Western world? The answer in a word: “postmodernism.”[28]

Understanding postmodernism. In the “modern” world, truth was considered to be objective. In the “postmodern” world, it is viewed as subjective and relative. How did this shift come about?

We begin with Friedrich Nietzsche, the “patron saint of postmodern philosophy.”[29] The son and grandson of ministers, he rejected Christianity as an outdated refuge for the weak. In his view, “truth” is personal and speculative, a function of the language we choose to use.[30] For instance, the machine on which I am writing this chapter is either a laptop computer, a fancy typewriter, or a strange box that makes annoying clicking noises, depending on whether I, my grandfather, or a preschooler is describing it.

According to Nietzsche, there is no such thing as objective truth, just your truth and my truth.

This assertion paralleled Friedrich Schleiermacher's earlier belief that biblical texts are merely reflections of their authors' worldviews. According to this "father of modern liberalism," the Bible should be treated like a journal—instructive for revealing the minds of its authors and helpful to the degree that we choose to apply its principles to our lives.[31]

Language philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey,[32] Hans-Georg Gadamer,[33] and Ludwig Wittgenstein[34] advanced the view that language contains no objective meaning. Its value is determined solely by its context and the degree to which the reader finds it relevant. Postmodern thinkers such as Michel Foucault,[35] Jacques Derrida,[36] and Richard Rorty[37] further argued that truth claims are expressions of power, our personal version of reality, convenient fictions that work to help us make sense of the world. All postmodern thinkers agree that there are no absolute truths, only subjective experiences and beliefs.

Responding to postmodernism. This postmodern, contemporary view of truth has undermined biblical authority and created a generation of people who consider themselves "spiritual but not religious." (The slogan atop the Spiritual But Not Religious website announces, "All Religions Contain Some Wisdom But No One Religion Contains All Wisdom."[38])

Seen in this way, the Bible is a diary of religious experiences. It tells us what Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and others understood about God, but it is not normative for us unless we choose to make it so. Christian education is thus an optional endeavor by which subjective truth claims are disseminated and explained to those who happen to believe them.

We can respond to this challenge in three ways. The first is logical: to deny absolute truth is to make an absolute truth claim. This is not a new worldview; four centuries before Christ, a philosophical school known as the "Skeptics" argued that there was no such thing as truth, and they were sure of it.

Our second response is ethical: if all truth is relative, the Holocaust was just Hitler's "truth" and 9/11 was just al-Qaeda's "truth." There is no way to measure one ethical standard against another. Chaos ensues.

The third is practical: in a world that values "truth" by its relevance to their lives, we can show others the transforming power of the gospel in our personal experience. When they see that the Bible is relevant for us, they

may want to learn how it can be relevant for them. Teaching the stories of Scripture is an excellent way to show postmodern people the value of biblical truth for those who first encountered it. Sharing our personal faith experience then opens the door to sharing the gospel.

Can such an approach be effective? Will we abandon our biblical heritage if we focus on the relevance of Scripture before we teach its truthfulness? Actually, we will return to it.

Most early Christians had no social standing in the Greco-Roman world. They were charged with teaching a book most in their culture had never heard of, much less valued as true. If they began by citing biblical assertions, they would gain no traction in their culture. So apostolic Christians built their kingdom-advancing ministries on personal relevance and practical service to others.[39] As a result, they sparked the most powerful spiritual movement the world has ever known.

We live in a culture more like that of the first Christians than any we have seen since their day. They had no institutions or buildings with which to attract others; our institutions and buildings are considered by most non-Christians to be outdated and irrelevant. Their culture had no commitment to biblical authority, and so they began with biblical relevance. They showed skeptics the difference the gospel made in their lives. And they earned the right to share its truth with their world.

When people followed their example by trusting their Lord, early Christians then focused diligently on teaching the truths of Scripture to them: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). After “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit,” they taught them to obey the commands of their Lord (Matt. 28:19, 20). Christian education was not their strategy for evangelism but for equipping evangelists. And they soon “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6, KJV).

So can we.

How Do We Make Disciples in the World? Global Challenges and Opportunities

A “great awakening” is commonly defined by historians as a spiritual movement that transforms cultures and nations. The Western world has seen

four such movements: in 1734 (often called “the Great Awakening”); in 1792; in 1858; and in 1904–50 (sometimes called the “Welsh Revival”).

Now a fifth Great Awakening is sweeping our world. According to David Barrett, author of the *World Christian Encyclopedia,* 72,900 people become Christians every day. More are coming to faith in Christ than at any time in Christian history. In Africa, 24,000 will become followers of Jesus today; 19,400 in Asia; and 21,000 today in Latin America.[40]

Another recent study of this phenomenon cites numbers of new Christians that are far higher than those documented by Barrett. John Micklethwait is editor in chief of *The Economist;* his writing partner, Adrian Wooldridge, is its Washington bureau chief and columnist. Both are Oxford graduates; one is Roman Catholic, the other an atheist. In *God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World*,[41] they describe this remarkable spiritual awakening sweeping the world. Here are some facts about the global explosion of Christian faith:

- A million people become Christians every week, the largest number in Christian history.
- In 1900 there were roughly 10 million Christians in Africa; today there are 400 million, comprising some 45% of the population.
- Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, began in a tent in 1958 and now claims 830,000 members; 3,000 people join every week. Five of the ten largest churches in the world are in South Korea.
- Pentecostalism, begun in a Los Angeles ghetto in 1906, now claims 500 million followers around the globe.
- In 1900, 80% of the world’s Christians lived in Europe and the United States; today, 60% live in the developing world. More Roman Catholics attend church in the Philippines than in Italy. Churches in the developing world now export 100,000 missionaries.

I have traveled personally to many of the nations where this awakening is occurring. I have been to Beijing, where I was told that 100,000 people come to Christ every day in the People’s Republic of China. I have traveled seven times to Cuba, where a million people have become Christians in the last ten years.[42]

My last time there, I preached at First Baptist Church in Camagüey, in the central part of the island. On the morning before I preached, 294 Cubans went into their community, knocking on 1,050 doors and sharing the gospel

with more than 5,000 people. The next day, 330 of them made public professions of faith in a church located four feet from the Communist headquarters in their city.

I have seen the explosion of Christianity in Brazil, the Hillsong worship movement in Australia, and the remarkable expansion of Christianity in Bangladesh. More Muslims are becoming Christians than ever before, many after seeing visions and having dreams of Jesus.[43]

The great need across this global Christian expansion is for disciple-making. In much of the developing Christian world, access to theological materials is scarce at best. Many converts face grave challenges and do not have the resources to purchase discipleship materials even if they were available to them.

There is a great opportunity today for Christian educators who are willing to produce resources for the global Christian movement. The Internet enables us to transmit these materials across the globe. Ministry partners in the various countries where awakening is taking place will help us translate and disseminate these materials.

By teaching the word and ways of God to those who are advancing the kingdom around the world, we multiply both our ministry and the larger Christian community.

Conclusion: Disciple-Making as Missional Christianity

The church exists to extend the kingdom of God by leading people to obey all Jesus commanded us. This missional initiative requires Christian education, as people must be taught what they are to obey and equipped for their assignments in the kingdom. Only when churches grow by spiritual multiplication can they reach their culture with the gospel.

Such disciple-making is vital for effective leadership in the kingdom. Bernard Swain describes the four types of leadership popular today:

- Sovereign: the leader determines both the vision and its implementation.
- Parallel: the leader serves the organization as it seeks and fulfills its vision collectively.
- Mutual: the leader serves as a member of a team that shares its duties and responsibilities.

- Semi-mutual: the leader defines the vision and direction of the organization and then serves its members as they achieve that vision through their own initiatives and efforts.[44]

The semi-mutual style is typically most effective in the church. As leaders call their congregations to their Great Commission mandate, they must then serve and equip them for fulfilling this global responsibility.

Oswald Sanders, in his now-classic *Spiritual Leadership*, claims that "true greatness, true leadership, is found in giving yourself in service to others, not in coaxing or inducing others to serve you."[45] Max DePree, the former CEO of Herman Miller and author of bestselling leadership literature, defines leadership in this way:

> The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader.[46]

In the church context, we serve those we lead by teaching them to fulfill their kingdom assignment.

Peter Drucker, often called the "father of modern leadership theory," distinguished these four personalities needed for the tasks of top management:

- The "thought" person
- The "action" person
- The "people" person
- The "front" person

Drucker believed that these four temperaments are almost never found in a single person and warned, "the one-man top management job is a major reason why businesses fail to grow."[47] Effective leaders in missional churches will celebrate the gifts and passions of those they lead, empowering and encouraging them to fulfill God's vision for their lives and congregation.

Lao Tzu, the Chinese philosopher (born 604 BC) was right:

Fail to honor people, they fail to honor you;
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will all say, “We did this ourselves.”

Outside the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston there stands a statue of Brown himself, with this inscription beneath it: “To realize his vision he catalyzed achievement and excellence in others.” The same is true of any effective kingdom leader today.

When Allied armies advanced on the North African port of Eritrea during World War II, the fleeing Axis forces did an ingenious thing. They loaded barges with concrete and sank them across the mouth of the harbor, making it impossible for the approaching troops to enter.

But the Allies developed an even more inventive solution. They emptied several gigantic oil tanks, the kind that hold 100,000 barrels of oil and more, and sealed them watertight. They attached chains to each of them. At low tide their divers attached the other ends of the chains to the barges sitting on the bottom of the harbor. And when the tides rose, their power was so great that they lifted the sealed oil tanks and the cement-filled barges with them. It was then an easy task to dispose of the barges and reopen the harbor.

This power of the tides inspired Shakespeare to pen these immortal words:

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyages of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures *(Julius Caesar,* act IV, scene II).

There is a “full sea” on which the global Christian movement is now afloat. Christians who make Christ their King and use their gifts and influence to advance his kingdom are on the leading edge of this movement. Building kingdom Christians is the greatest need and opportunity of our day.

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus made the kingdom of God the central theme of his life and ministry. What contemporary alternatives compete for commitment in your life and church?
2. Disciples live for Christ as their King and share their faith with others. What is your personal strategy for extending God's kingdom?
3. Jesus called all Christians into ministry, not just the "clergy." How effectively is your church answering this call? What can you do to enlist and equip more believers for their kingdom assignments?
4. Postmodernism claims that all truth claims are personal and relative. Our most effective response is to demonstrate the truth of our faith with our actions. Would those who know you say that your life draws them closer to Christ? In what ways?
5. A spiritual awakening is sweeping the nations. Are you praying daily for such a movement of God in your church and community? What else will you do to advance moral and spiritual renewal today?

Chapter 2



HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Norma S. Hedin, Ph.D.

One of the phrases my husband and I have used as we have become empty-nesters is that we have gone “back to the future.” It is just the two of us at home, and my husband has even returned to a type of work he did early in our marriage. This phrase aptly describes the perspective of reviewing the history of “Christian Education,” since many of the approaches and discussions today are similar to those in previous eras. In addition, we find ourselves considering method and approaches for the future, while at the same time returning to the teachings and models in the Bible. Our original and primary textbook describes God’s plan from the beginning to be a teacher to His people, along with the various ways He communicated His truths. We can be sure that His plan from the beginning was for creativity and adaptation to the context of time and place. James Estep, in *C. E.: The Heritage of Christian Education*, makes the point that Christian education has always been dynamic, responding to changes both inside and outside the faith community, including a relevance to the culture.[48] If there is one lesson that we may learn, other than the importance of creativity of approaches to education throughout the centuries, it is that Christian education has always adapted to the changes in context, culture, needs of the people, and purposes of God in each generation, from the earliest days to the present. A review of the history of Christian education reveals just that.

Teaching and Learning in Ancient Israel

One need only turn to the first books of the Old Testament to recognize the importance of God's teaching and instruction to His plan and activity. As soon as God created man, He began to instruct him regarding the rules of living in this created world (Genesis 2:16—17). Created in the image of God, man and woman were to follow God's commands and live together in harmony with their Creator. This earliest Hebrew culture was a primitive culture and as a result, the form of education was primitive as well. The life of a nomad did not lend itself to the establishment of formal schools. So in the beginning, as families and tribes moved from place to place, instruction was provided through family life, tribal responsibilities, and oral instruction.

God spoke to Abraham and used him to found a great nation (Gen. 2:1—3) and then led Abraham's descendants in their struggles to be obedient to the one true God. Eventually, the nation of Israel's disobedience to God's laws led to their captivity in Egypt, but God remembered them and heard their cries and brought them out of Egypt to live as a nation set apart for God (Exodus 3:7). In these ancient times, God instructed the Israelites through direct instruction (Job 36:22), through the tabernacle (Exod. 35—40), through feasts, fasts, and festivals (Leviticus 23), through priests and Levites (2 Chronicles 17:7—9), through the temple (1 Kings 7), through prophets (Jeremiah 13:1—11; Amos 5; Isaiah 1:19—20), and eventually through exile again. As the pages of the Old Testament come to a close, the exiles are returning home to the Promised Land (Israel), and synagogues are being established for instruction. The laws have been written down by scribes, and the traditions have been recorded for instruction.

Education in ancient Israel was entirely religious education, and the only textbook was the Scriptures. The Hebrew view that all education is education in holiness permeated this nation called by God. While some training was provided for vocation,[49] for war (Judges 20:16; 2 Kings 11:10; 1 Samuel 17:41; 2 Samuel 1:21), and for building the tabernacle and temple, most education was instruction in the laws of God—how to live life as a follower of Yahweh, how to be holy, and how to avoid the wrath of God. Education in ancient Israel was also informal education. With the exception of the priests and Levites, who received specific instruction for work in the tabernacle and temple, education was carried out in the context of the home by the parents and members of a community.

While up to this point most education was in the home, the synagogues began to provide some instruction in the law during the Old Testament periods. Several theories relate to the rise of the synagogue, but the most popular view is that its full educational value in the community grew out of the conditions of the exile. While scattered into various areas away from Jerusalem and away from the temple, Jewish families began to congregate together for meetings and for prayer (Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 33:30f). Eventually, the synagogue became a place of teaching and instruction, and later in its history, became the "the most widespread and the most enduring of all the educational institutions after the Exile. It was the first institution to offer systematic instruction to both sexes,"[50] and out of it grew other institutions such as elementary schools, secondary schools, and schools of higher learning.[51] The influence of the synagogue continued through the intertestamental period, and the accounts in New Testament writings reveal the synagogue as an integral part of the religious and educational system during the time of Jesus.

Examples of Teachers in the Bible

Teachers	***Biblical Reference***
Parents	Deuteronomy 6
Community	Leviticus 23
Priests and Levites	Deuteronomy 31:9—14
Prophets	Deuteronomy 18:18—19; Isaiah 8:16
Wise or Sages	1 Kings 4:29–30; Proverbs 22:17–21
Rabbis and Scribes	Mark 6—7
Church Leaders	Ephesians 4:7–16

Teaching and Learning in the New Testament

The pages of the New Testament introduce the reader to the Jews as oppressed people once again, waiting for the deliverance of God, and the story follows the birth, life, and death of the Messiah. God continues to educate through the New Testament writers, introducing the coming of Jesus from four perspectives in the Gospels. The role of Jesus as a great teacher leaps off the pages of each of the Gospel accounts, and his words shocked and scandalized a generation who had been so misled by its priests and

teachers of the law that they were desperate for some relief from the requirements of religious life. Although Jesus used methods and approaches to teaching very similar to the teachers of the day,[52] He taught as no one ever had, casting off the burdens of being religious and calling men and women to a life of discipleship. His teaching included parables, poetry, object lessons, comparisons, questions, puns, and hyperbole. While he was referred to as a prophet, the most common title for him during his life was "rabbi" or teacher.

After Jesus' death, God raised up Jesus' disciples, and these apostles taught the illiterate and uneducated followers to give up their lives in order to follow the Messiah. The persecutor of the church, Paul, after a dramatic conversion experience, used his Jewish background and training to instruct the new churches,[53] utilizing mentoring and didactic teaching and writing of letters to the churches to encourage, instruct, confront, correct, and express his deep love for those who were followers of the Way.[54] The entire New Testament is instructive and has been the foundation for Christian living since the followers of Jesus were called Christians. The circulated letters of Paul became part of the New Testament as we know it. As persecution of Christians increased, believers were scattered and new groups of believers were formed. These early days of the church were dangerous and yet the church grew rapidly.

The Early Church (First to Sixth Century AD)

As the church grew, it became obvious that the new converts, particularly those from non-Jewish backgrounds, needed more instruction. Coming from Gentile backgrounds meant they had little knowledge about previous Hebrew writings and the ways of God. Eason calls this a "pedagogical problem without parallel" within the growing Jerusalem church (Acts 2; 4; 5; 8)[55] and later in the church at Antioch (Acts 11; 13—15). Eventually, a more formal system of instruction began to grow, including the informal catechumenal schools for lay people, who were baptized at the end of the course of study to "ensure authenticity of faith and consistency in practice."[56] *Catechism* and *catechumen* are derived from a Greek word that is translated "instruct." Divided into levels of *hearers* or seekers, *kneelers* or learners, and *chosen* or candidates, the instruction included increasingly more involvement and intensity of teaching leading to baptism.[57] Teaching

was based on the confession of faith (the Apostles' Creed[58]) and the *Didache*,[59] the teachings of the twelve apostles on moral and spiritual precepts. While initially effective for adults, the popularity of this type of instruction declined due to the baptism of children (who grew up in the faith) and, "when pagans, lacking genuine motivation for joining the faith, were commanded by law to attend the church."[60] A more formal catechetical model was used to equip church leaders for ministry and training.[61] Beginning in Alexandria under the direction of Pantaenus in AD 179, who was later succeeded by Clement and then Origen, these schools focused on intellectual training in theology, literature, philosophy, and ethics.[62]

Teaching in the Early Church

Jerusalem Church	*Antioch Church*
• Acts 2:1–4, 42–47 • Acts 4:1–2, 32–35 • Acts 5:12–14, 42 • Acts 8:1–3	• Acts 11:19–29 • Acts 13:1–3 • Acts 14:26 to 15:1, 8–11 • Acts 15:19–22, 28–29 • Acts 17:2–3
What did they teach? • The Christian interpretation of the Old Testament (Acts 2:17–21, 25–28) • The gospel message (1 Cor. 15:3–5) • The individual's confession of faith in Jesus as Christ and Lord (Rom. 10:9–10) • Teachings of Jesus, descriptions of His life and ministry (1 Cor. 11:23f) • Christian way of life (1 John 1:3)	

Lucien Coleman, Jr. *Why the Church Must Teach.* Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1984.

Medieval Times (AD 476-AD 1320)

Following the fall of the Roman Empire in AD 476, the church became the center of education. Monks began monastic schools—informally at first, but more organized later—to focus on creating "a counterculture to resist the

encroachment of the Greek classics on Christian education."[63] Eventually, monasteries became the "gateways to Christian higher learning."[64] Continuing the tensions from previous periods, monasteries in the East (eastern Mediterranean) focused purely on study of the Scripture, rejecting secular knowledge, while those in the West employed a more rational approach to education, including both the Scriptures and the Latin classics and theology.[65] Books were scarce, and so oral teaching was the popular method. The curriculum in the West included "theology, the seven liberal arts (the *trivium* comprising grammar, rhetoric, logic; and the *quadrivium* comprising arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music) plus extracurricular activities on agriculture, architecture, transcribing of ancient manuscripts and documents, and the decorative arts."[66]

Building upon monastic education, the church later introduced episcopal education (or cathedral education, because the training was in the local cathedrals) to train future pastors, recognizing that the training needed for these leaders was inadequate. The twelfth century found these cathedral schools flourishing, so much so that even secular students came to these for higher learning.[67]

Nonreligious schools, called guild schools, were organized in communities and provided education for the prosperous middle class. These schools "paved the way for public education, including the establishment of the medieval university. A greater proportion of the public became literate and was able to improve their lives as a result."[68] Palace schools were developed to train nobility, and universities gave rise to the intellectual movement called scholasticism. Many medieval historians would contend that scholasticism was the premier form of the Christian intellectual system, marked by the development of a Christian mind leading to faith by the means of logical analysis. However, while early schools were exclusively based on the Scriptures and theology, later schools gradually adopted the seven liberal arts: grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Astronomy included the church calendar, and music included the study of church worship.[69]

Renaissance and Reformation (14th—16th Centuries)

The Renaissance in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries brought changes that prepared the way for the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The focus

on individualism and humanism, the revival of the fine arts and appreciation for culture, and significant scientific discoveries led to revisions of views previously held by the church. While the focus on individuals had its negative results, some positive outcomes developed as well. Higher standards of scholarship developed, along with the positive relationships between students and teachers. Geographical divisions in the influence of humanism can be seen in the influence of humanism in Southern Europe as secular in nature and the influence in Northern Europe as more church centered and focused on Scripture.[70]

Similarities between the Renaissance and the Reformation are significant for Christian education. Both focused on the role of the individual—either autonomy or individual faith. "Both movements were expressions of societal renewal: in the case of the Renaissance it was cultural and intellectual; in the Reformation, it was primarily theological and ecclesial."[71]

In addition, both movements expanded the curriculum beyond the traditional, as well as created an environment for questioning of existing authorities. Ultimately, however, the goals of the two movements were different. The Reformation included the masses, focused on the Bible, and led to a commitment to and communion with God, in contrast to the secular, elitist, person-centered focus of the Renaissance.[72]

The leader of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, proposed both formal and informal educational reforms. He developed catechisms for instruction of the laity and the clergy, he instructed the congregation through hymns that emphasized the basics of the Christian faith, and he translated the Bible into German for the layperson to read.[73] "Other reformers, such as Zwingli (1484—1531) and Calvin (1509–1564) in Switzerland and John Knox (1505–1572) in Scotland, also organized schools and developed catechisms to aid the instruction of children in the faith."[74] John Knox is also credited for the emphasis on the minister as a teacher. He arranged for ministers to instruct children in the catechism on Sunday afternoons.[75]

One of the major educational leaders of this time period was John Amos Comenius (1592–1670). Rightly called the father of modern education, he was a Moravian bishop and teacher who established and ran schools in Poland, Sweden, and Hungary; wrote about sound educational practices; and developed curricular materials. "He sought to use education to shape and nurture the human soul and help it find solutions to the world's ills."[76] Together with Francis Bacon, Pestalozzi, Herbart, Froebel, and Rousseau,

educators in this time period focused on the innate goodness of human nature, and educational methods focused on growth in character and using knowledge to become moral and ethical beings.[77] They also placed humans, as developmental and learning beings, in the center of the learning process, identifying approaches that actively involved students and recognized participation as helpful to learning.[78]

Modern Educational Ministry

C. B. Eavey states that the "history of modern Christian education is to a great extent the history of the development of the Sunday School.., "[79] However, Sunday School as we know it today is drastically different from its original form. Begun during eighteenth-century England, its target group was the poverty-stricken, illiterate, out-of-control children populating the streets of Gloucester, England, on Sundays. Without child labor laws, children worked in factories during the week and were thus unable to attend school. Robert Raikes, a wealthy, altruistic man, began an experiment of providing instruction on Sundays to children in homes. "Sunday school was not in a church building, nor was it even a ministry of the church. Rather it was anywhere children could gather for instruction."[80] After a three-year experiment (1780–1783), Raikes declared his experiment a success, and through the help of the Sunday School Society and the London Sunday School Union, advanced the Sunday School movement to the use of paid teachers and the establishment of a religious curriculum. Other social reformers in England, such as William Fox and John and Charles Wesley, accepted the Sunday School as a means of social and religious reforms. However, others viewed the Sunday School as "dangerous, demoralizing, bad institutions, and agents of the devil."[81] Of particular concern was the role of laypersons in teaching (as opposed to trained clergy) and the fear that workers who learned to read would be difficult to control and would demand higher wages.[82]

One of the major issues confronting the Sunday School movement was that monetary support for the school was absorbed by the modest sum that teachers were paid. There was no money for Bibles or other learning materials. After Raikes published an account of his work in his newspaper, articles were published throughout Great Britain and resulted in the "ladies of fashion" volunteering their time as teachers.[83] In addition, John Wesley

called for volunteer teachers to replace paid ones so that resources could be used for materials. By the time of Raikes's death in 1811, there were Sunday Schools scattered across England, with a combined attendance of over 400,000 pupils.[84]

The first Sunday Schools in America following Raikes's pattern were led by William Elliott in 1785, and from 1785 to 1815, a number of Sunday Schools based on the English pattern were started.[85] Following the growing concern of lack of public schools for instruction for children, the Sunday School Society was organized in Philadelphia in 1790 to instruct children in moral behavior and religious character.[86] Eavey makes an important point about the Sunday School movement:

> For around forty years the modern Sunday school movement was promoted independently of the church as an organization. The church regarded the Sunday school as a philanthropic effort concerned with the work of improving the moral condition of ignorant and neglected classes outside the church. Many church leaders maintained that it was a desecration of the Lord's Day to hold a school on Sunday. And it was honestly thought by some that the Sunday school would hurt the influence of the church…Many churches throughout the land would not allow a Sunday school to be conducted in their buildings. In the more enlightened communities, church officials rented church buildings to Sunday schools until it came to be realized that the movement was of value to the cause of Christ.[87]

In our own current experience, it is easy to think that churches have always offered Sunday School. However, the church's widespread acceptance of the Sunday School did not occur until after the War of 1812. The organization known as the American Sunday-School Union, whose mission was "to establish and maintain Sunday schools, and to publish and circulate moral and religious publications," was not approved until 1924.[88]

In North America, religious groups from Europe settling in the colonies brought the idea of the Sunday School with them. And as early as 1737, Sunday Schools sprang out of the Wesleyan Revival. However, these schools were decidedly different from the English model, focusing instead on

religious training for children already in the fellowship.[89] In an effort to plant Sunday Schools in more rural areas, the American Sunday School Union (ASSU) was founded. By 1832, more than 8,200 ASSU Sunday Schools were located in twenty-seven states, and by 1975 that number had grown to more than 65,000 Sunday Schools in thirty-six states. “In 1889 it was claimed that at least ten million persons were enrolled in American Sunday Schools.”[90]

Twentieth Century

Described as “Protestantism’s most important single agency for doing the work of God in the world,”[91] the decline of the Sunday School that followed in the twentieth century was disappointing. However, because various religious groups were included in Sunday School associations, particularly the representatives of mainline denominations, the growth in support of a more “progressive” view of religious education left evangelicals dissatisfied. The inclusion of experience-centered lessons rather than Bible-centered lessons, and the perception of liberalism and modernism in theology caused evangelicals to withdraw from the movement.[92] As a result, evangelicals shifted “their time and energy to other pursuits, including the training of Sunday School teachers, the development of Bible Institutes, and the utilization of new models of religious instruction, including the Vacation Bible School and the Week Day Church School.”[93] New national organizations were established but eventually gave way to regional organizations, and denominational publishers took up the task of providing curriculum and support for Sunday Schools for their own denomination in place of the national publishers. These materials addressed the concerns related to particular denominational beliefs as well as educational perspectives.

The Southern Baptist Convention organized for growth for the Sunday School in the early 1900s and was fueled by the expansion of the missionary movement and the focus on equipping lay people for service within the teaching ministries of the church. The Vacation Bible School provided opportunities for evangelistic outreach and Bible teaching, and the Week Day Church School movement extended the teaching ministries beyond Sunday morning. In 1931, an interdenominational organization was formed called the Evangelical Teacher Training Association (ETTA) to develop

standards and materials for teacher training in Bible institutes, colleges, and seminaries. Religious educators like John Milburn Price, Clarence Benson, Herman Horne, Gaines S. Dobbins, and Henrietta C. Mears led the way to develop degree programs, organizations, processes, and curriculum for religious education in the church.[94]

The middle part of the twentieth century reveals an "explosion of parachurch educational ministry efforts to assist the evangelical movement."[95] In addition to organizations for cooperative efforts toward curriculum development, this period saw the rise of Child Evangelism Fellowship (1937), Christian Service Brigade (1937), Girls Guild (now Pioneer Clubs), and AWANA Youth Association (1950), all working on outreach and ministry with children. Organizations like Youth for Christ (1944), Young Life (1938), Fellowship of Christian Athletes (1954) and Word of Life Bible Clubs (1959) are just a few of the evangelical youth ministry organizations founded. Ministry with college students was begun by Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship (1934) and Campus Crusade for Christ (1951), and ministry to military personnel was begun as Navigators (1939).[96]

The later twentieth century in North America has seen significant growth in the number of evangelical churches and in their increasing support for children's ministries and youth ministries, as well as "the explosion of resources from evangelical publishing companies in support of these ministries, extensive training opportunities for lay leaders, and the development of higher education training programs."[97] The growth of age-group ministries paved the way for new staff opportunities and expanded curriculum interests. Rather than rely so heavily on parachurch groups, the church has shifted to more support for these programs within their own congregations. In addition, churches have moved away from a "generalist" education leader in the church to more specific age-focused ministers. With these new "positions" came the need for training for these, thus expanding the growth of seminary training programs.

Additional changes relate to growth of private Christian schools and the growth of home schooling for children, "each reflecting the increased concern of parents for the education of their children, including their spiritual instruction."[98] This emphasis on families has overflowed into the twenty-first century.

The rise of megachurches with various ministries springing up in their congregations has led to less emphasis on formal ministry training and more emphasis on training their own leaders for specific ministries. At least one seminary has partnered with Saddleback Community Church in California to offer degrees with the "purpose driven" emphasis.[99] Another trend is the focus on generational groups, whether baby boomers or other generational groups. The chapters in this text will describe the unique challenges of each age group or generation, with specific suggestions for ministry for each one.

The role of technology in the church is another challenge for today's Christian educators. Will ministers harness technology for kingdom use or ignore its benefits to focus on simpler approaches? Each congregation must decide how to continue the work of educating each generation and not be afraid to adapt to the challenges in ever-changing culture.

Reflections for the Twenty-First Century

When we reflect over the years of history of this field called "Christian education," we are reminded that the issues we face today are not necessarily new ones, and neither are they unusual. The tensions between focusing on content and focusing on piety and spiritual formation are ongoing discussions. The role of the church in training their own or in reaching out to the community is still up for dialogue. The conversations about age group segregation and intergenerational teaching continue. Each generation must choose its own approach to carrying out the command of Jesus to make disciples.

Pazmiño aptly describes our reactions to the lessons learned from historical accounts:

> Christians have not chosen the timing for their historical journeys, but being in a particular historical time requires learning from the past and living in the present with a concern for God's future. Viewing the past provides a rootedness from which to address the challenges of the present and future world in which the Christian vocation is to be expressed. In appreciating the light and shadows of the past, Christians can reappropriate an all too forgotten heritage, resulting in rejoicing, repentance, and renewal.[100]

Our “rootedness” is in the Scripture and in the lessons learned through the centuries of Christian teaching. The “challenges of the present” are often overwhelming, but ones that we must address. And the “future world” will be those issues that are yet to unfold.

I believe that God’s plan from the beginning was for creativity and adaptation to the context of time and place. Historical lessons teach us that each generation needs teaching and instruction, and those who are called by God to teach and lead must effectively plan and carry out that teaching as we make disciples in the future and for the future.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe teaching during the period of ancient Israel? What challenges would a life of *nomadism* present for this young nation?
2. Choose one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) and read through it looking for the methods of Jesus. How did He create interest in learning? How did He challenge thinking? How did He approach those who truly wanted to learn?
3. What challenges were present for organizing for making disciples in the early church? Read through the first half of the Book of Acts and look for challenges and solutions to these problems.
4. What factors motivated the growth of Christian teaching during the Reformation? How do these factors compare with our motivation for making disciples today?
5. Describe your experiences with Sunday School (or Bible study). How would you compare your experiences to those of the first Sunday School started by Robert Raikes? What was his motivation for reaching out to these children? Compare his motivation to the motivation of churches today.
6. With what parachurch organizations have you been associated? Describe the mission and motivation of these groups. How do these organizations relate to the local church today?
7. What are the greatest changes you have observed in your experience of being a part of a church? If you did not grow up in a church, how is the church different from your expectations?

8. If you were to go “back to the future,” what era would you want to go back to and why? What areas of discipleship would you want to know more about and explore more fully? Choose one of the resources from “For Further Reading,” and read more about this era and summarize your observations.

For Further Reading

Anthony, Michael and Warren Benson. *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2003.

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Chapter 3



CONTEXT FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Norma S. Hedin, Ph.D.

The Bob Dylan song in the 1960s called “The Times They Are a-Changin’” characterized the inevitable social change in that generation. The reality of change is so much a part of our experience in this generation that we cannot even be sure that what we experience today will be true tomorrow. Many people reading these words have never used a paper phone book, a printed encyclopedia, a floppy disk drive, or a card catalog. Because of technological changes in the last decade, instead of watching a television show as it airs, we now “Tivo” it and watch it on demand. We download movies on our computers rather than watching them at the theater, and we update our friends and families with information in seconds via Facebook, Twitter, or the latest communication vehicle. Instead of phone chains, we are updated through text messaging, which can alert us to danger immediately. Recently, instead of listening to the news to see whether the university was closed because of weather, I received a text message of the weather-related closing but then held my class session online. In addition to these changes that we experience daily, some reports indicate that approximately 20% of people move every year, and the average person changes jobs every two to three years. These constant changes create instability in professional life and family life, as well as in the church and community.

Because of the extreme changes around us, the context of ministry is changing as well. While human nature is the same and the struggle against sin has continued since the Fall, the everyday experiences in the church and

the people who are involved in the church in the United States have changed dramatically. From population shifts to economic changes, both positive and negative, to communication changes, to social media opportunities, to technology options, to safety issues, to attitudes toward the church, and participation in the community and in the church, the shifts in ministry are just as radical. Not all of the changes are negative, but they are certainly significant for those of us who want to minister to an ever-altering population. We cannot really "go back" to another era, even though that may be our desire at times! We must consider the situation in which we find ourselves today and realistically reflect on how the changing circumstances of our world affect disciple-making in this generation and in the future. In this chapter, we will explore some of these contextual changes as well as key issues growing out of those changes that need to be addressed in the discipleship ministries of the church.

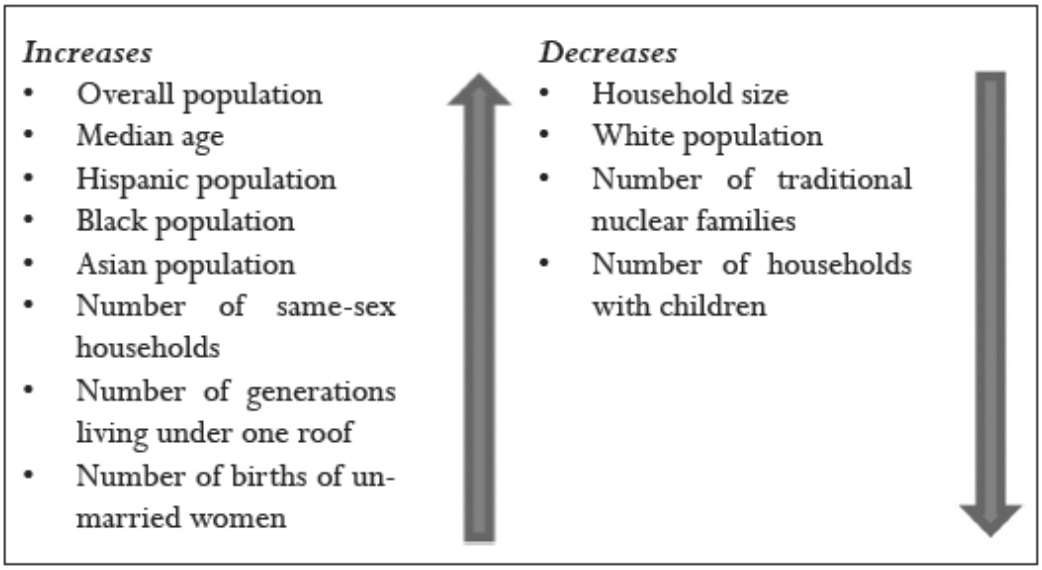
Demographics and Population Changes

From 2007 to 2010, the population of the United States grew from 203 million to more than 308 million. This represented a 9.7% increase in the population in three years, with increases in population in every state, except for Michigan and Puerto Rico, based on 2010 census data.[101] While many parts of the census data could be explored, the general characteristics of the U.S. population in 2010 included a median age of 37.2, an increase from 32.9 in 1990,[102] and an average household size of 2.58 individuals, down from 3.01 in 1973.[103]

Educationally, about 84% of those who lived in America had earned a high school diploma in 2010, while 27% had received Bachelor-level degrees.[104] Additional educational information obtained from the *National Center for Education Statistics 2009* report indicated a decrease in the number of White students, and a 10% increase in the number of students self-identifying as Hispanic.[105] Overall, undergraduate and post-baccalaureate enrollments increased between 1976 and 2009, but racial/ethnic group rates differ, resulting in a shift in the racial/ethnic distribution.[106] In 2010, 32% of twenty-five to twenty-nine year olds had completed bachelor's degrees, while 7% had completed master's degrees or higher.[107]

Diversity, while predicted, has happened faster than anyone could have anticipated.

United States Demographic Changes



Cultural Changes

Starting in 1997, the definitions of race categories for the census were changed to include the following: White; Black or African American; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.[108] Hispanic or Latino categories are not racial categories, and so "Hispanic or Latino" refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.[109] Further questions were asked on the 2010 census to identify changes in the cultural or ethnic makeup of America. While 72.4% of Americans self-identify as white, a larger percentage of those indicate that they are of Hispanic or Latino origin. Hispanic growth is particularly strong in certain states such as Texas. While the overall U.S. population figures reveal that 16.3% are Hispanic, Texas and California figures both report 37.6% as Hispanic.[110] New Mexico, another state bordering Mexico, reports 46.3%.[111] Of the growth in population from 2000 to 2010, more than half was due to the growth in the Hispanic population,[112] a 43% increase since 2000.[113] Additional information from the 2010 census indicated changes in

the racial makeup of America as well. An increase of 14% of Americans who self-identify as Black or a combination of Black with another race was reported.[114] The Asian population grew faster than any other major race group between 2000 and 2010, with a 43.3% increase since 2000.[115]

The significant aspect of this information is that diversity, while predicted, has happened faster than anyone could have anticipated. Black-white racial dynamics have dominated much of American history; however, the explosive growth of Hispanics has headlined every cultural demographic report in recent years. Robert Lang, an urban sociologist at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, says that "an entire Venezuela's worth of Hispanics was added in just those two decades."[116] William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, indicates that "everything about America now has to do with diversity that we could hardly recognize in 1990."[117] He predicts that in forty years Americans will read about the issues related to immigration and diversity and "wonder what the big deal was."[118] Additionally, a growing number of Americans claim more than one race, and now more than one in seven new marriages includes spouses of difference racial or ethnic backgrounds.[119]

Additional cultural changes reflected an increase in the number of same-sex households, a decline in the traditional nuclear family, an increase in the number of generations living under one roof, an increase in living arrangements among unrelated people, an increase in the average household size, and a decrease in the number of households with children. The number of births by unmarried women has risen from 26% to 41% since 1990, and both men and women are postponing marriage, with the median age moving up two years for both: from twenty-six to twenty-eight for men and from twenty-four to twenty-six for women.[120] Both men and women are living longer, although the percentages for men have increased more than for women.

In summary, the population in America continues to grow, even though it is slight compared to other countries. However, it is not just the growth in sheer numbers that affects the ministry of the church, it is also the shift in cultural groups in various areas of the country, bringing different traditions, beliefs, and perspectives about religion. We are no longer a predominantly White nation, and the acceptance of the diversity will be unquestioned in the future. With this diversity comes the tendency for Americans to mix multiple faiths. Many blend diverse traditions, while others "blend Christianity with

Eastern or New Age beliefs, such as reincarnation, astrology and the presence of spiritual energy in physical objects."[121]

Changes in Church Attendance and Attitudes

The annual *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* reports that most denominations lost members in 2010. Those few claiming growth in numbers included Roman Catholics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Assemblies of God. Southern Baptists registered a loss of .24 percent, even though the SBC continues to be the largest Protestant denomination. Also registering losses were the Presbyterian Church USA, American Baptists, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.[122]

The Hartford Institute for Religion Research asserts that there are roughly 335,000 religious congregations in the United States, and of those, about 300,000 are Protestant and other Christian churches and 22,000 are Catholic and Orthodox churches. The median size of churches in the U.S. is 75 on Sunday mornings.[123] Note that the National Congregations Study measured median church size—the point at which half the churches are smaller and half are larger. An average number is 186.[124] Those churches defined as "megachurches,"[125] with at least 2,000 attending each Sunday, were numbered around 1,600 in 2011,[126] and about 10% of all American worshippers attend these large congregations each weekend.

Megachurches have been identified as a religious phenomenon, with all but five states reporting these larger congregations. Concentrations of megachurches were found in California, Texas, Florida, and Georgia in 2005, but 2011 reports show increases in all areas of the country, including the Midwest. However, very few of these large congregations are found in the Northeast.[127] Unlike smaller congregations, megachurches seem to be growing steadily and thriving, partially due to the use of multisites, social media, and various worship options that extend beyond Sunday morning.[128] So while overall church attendance in America is declining, megachurches are steadily picking up new attendees.

While general church attendance provides one picture of religious behavior, additional information related to church attendance and attitudes toward church have been explored by George Barna. His "State of the Church Series 2011" focused on how America's faith has shifted during the past twenty years concerning fourteen religious variables.[129] Reporting

general trends, and then reporting by generation, gender, racial/ethnic differences, and region of the country, Barna examined how America's faith has "shifted."

Generally from 1991 to 2011, Americans reported declines in several areas: American adults read their Bibles less, attend church less, attend Sunday School less, and volunteer in the church less.[130] In addition, the percentage of Americans categorized as "unchurched" (defined as not attending any religious events at a church during the prior six months, except weddings or funerals) increased from 24% to 37%. Interestingly, those characterized as "born again" rose from 35 to 40%, but those who believe God is all-knowing, all powerful, and perfect Creator of the universe who still rules the world today" has decreased from 74% to 67%. Perceptions of the Bible as accurate have also decreased, but religious beliefs regarding the importance of faith, the view of Satan as a symbol of evil rather than a living entity, and a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs have remained constant.[131]

When examined by generations, "busters" (those born between 1965 and 1983) have increased in their Bible reading and volunteering, but they have also increased in their behavior as "unchurched"; that is, they do not attend a church at all. Both "baby boomers" (those born between 1946 and 1964) and older generations have exhibited declines in Sunday School attendance. Boomers volunteer less and attend church less, while the "builders" (those born between 1927 and 1945) have declined in Bible reading but remained constant in church attendance and volunteering.[132] Both men and women have declined in church attendance, Sunday School attendance, and in volunteering, but only women showed a significant decrease in time spent reading the Bible.[133] When examined by racial and ethnic categories, Blacks have been most stable in their religious behavior. In fact, "African-Americans are markedly more religious on a variety of measures than the U.S. population as a whole, including level of affiliation with a religion, attendance at religious services, frequency of prayer and religion's importance in life."[134] While both Whites and Hispanics have declined in attendance and in other measures, Hispanics had the most significant declines in church attendance, down twenty-one points, as well as in Sunday School attendance and Bible reading.[135]

Since church and Sunday School attendance and Bible reading have declined, it would follow that Bible knowledge has also decreased. The

"U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey" conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2010 found that atheists, agnostics, Jews, and Mormons outperform evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants, and Catholics on questions about the core teachings, history, and leading figures of major world religions. On questions specifically about Christianity, Mormons and evangelical Protestants showed the highest levels of knowledge, but even these groups could answer only about 60—65% of the questions correctly.[136] The general assessment, which probably matches our own anecdotal experiences, is that church attendance, involvement, and levels of biblical knowledge have all declined considerably.

Changes in Church Programming and Outreach

Not only have our culture and attitudes been altered over the decades, our perspectives and approaches to "doing church" have also been affected. With the complexity of life—so many choices and options in every area of life—this complexity has also filtered into the way we organize and lead churches. Various models of church organization will be addressed in later chapters; however, it is important to note that these changing perspectives are very much a part of the context for discipleship. One of the recent areas of study in this regard has been the focus on making church "simpler." Arguing that the complexity and busyness of life causes people to long for simplicity, Rainer and Geiger's work on *Simple Church*[137] unveils the efficiency of simplifying the purpose and process of church ministry to alleviate the massive programming responsibilities and "clutter" present in churches. The focus on Jesus' words to love God, love others, and then focus on serving others forms a simple purpose for any church. The results of their study revealed that "churches with a simple process for reaching and maturing people are expanding the kingdom. Church leaders who have designed a simple biblical process to make disciples are effectively advancing the movement of the gospel."[138] While the report of their first research in this area was published in 2008, the 2011 update indicated that churches that have chosen to be "simpler" in their approach were more effective in discipleship. However, churches also had a tendency to drift back toward complexity and drift away from mission.[139] They found that even those who wanted to keep things simple reported that it took discipline to stay focused on simple processes.

Rather than focus on making existing congregations larger and more effective, other writers in church growth focus on the emphasis of Jesus to make disciples in the community and the world through planting new congregations. Church planting approaches vary with context and purpose as well. However, at the heart of church planting is the desire to reach the community for Christ in ways that reduce competition among congregations. Various approaches to church planting are described in *Spin-Off Churches,* and one of the approaches connects to the research on megachurches reported above. From 1990 to 2004, the number of multisite churches increased from fewer than ten to over fifteen hundred.[140] Multisite churches "continue as one congregation with one vision, one staff, one treasury, one membership roster, one governing board, and one name. But these churches may have three, four, five or more worship venues each week."[141]

Other approaches to church planting are trends of sponsoring churches for special needs, such as drug addicts, the homeless, the poor, ex-cons, and the outcasts of society. Called "Set Free Church," these are springing up in metropolitan areas across the country.[142] While this type of church planting is "messier," it embraces the teachings of Jesus to reach out to those who are hurting and in desperate situations.

Sponsoring ethnically diverse congregations is another way to respond to the Great Commission. Some churches choose to invite an ethnic congregation to meet in the church facility. Others intentionally pass along their church facilities to an ethnic congregation when they relocate or merge with another congregation. Other churches proactively penetrate ethnic communities to establish a congregation.[143] While church planting has always been a part of church history, the need to continue to reach out to others to fulfill the Great Commission is necessary in our secular culture.

Changes in Reaching the "Unchurched"

With the increase in the number of individuals in America categorizing themselves as "unchurched," Stetzer and colleagues, in *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them,* describe the challenges of reaching out to young adults. They categorize the unchurched as: 1) those who have never been involved in church, 2) those who are "de-churched," having attended as children, 3) those who are "friendly unchurched," who are not particularly angry at the church, and then 4) the

"hostile unchurched," who are angry or had negative experiences with church.[144] They report that the church is perceived by the unchurched as "too critical about lifestyle issues, full of hypocrites, and not necessary for spiritual development."[145] However, they also found that "the younger unchurched clearly express a willingness to dialogue about Christianity and Jesus."[146] The changes in this age group alone are enough to overwhelm any minister. But Stetzer et al's practical suggestions of focusing on community, cultivating depth in teaching, taking responsibility for social needs, and connecting intergenerationally are all clear teachings contained in the Bible. Since the younger unchurched perceived that this is *not* what the church is about, a hard look at current practices would be in order. The Rainers agree that based on their research, young adults do not see the church as essential to their lives.[147]

Other writers indicate that like young adults, most people in all age groups today are hesitant to join a church. According to a 2010 Gallup poll, "Americans are less likely to identify with a particular religious group, and people do not belong to churches the way they once did, even when they show up for religious services."[148] Addressing the question of how we can welcome people who are ambivalent about belonging to a church, sociologists and pastors suggest that we must recognize that we "may only have a one-time shot"[149] to touch the lives of believers, and as a result, we must provide several "entry points to church and a variety of ways of participating—from just sitting in a pew to being on a committee to helping with worship planning."[150] Craig Mueller, pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Chicago, suggests that "in light of the demographics and the sociological trends, it is clear that we need to welcome people in their ambivalence, and at the same time find ways to invite and deepen commitment."[151] Others disagree, fearful that the loose ways of belonging to church reinforce a consumerist mentality. Research shows that belonging to organizations is good for people, and those "who belong to institutions tend to increase their contributions to society in other ways."[152] Additionally, being a part of a community is indispensable to the Christian life, and so "finding ways to adapt to people's looser ways of affiliating with church while continuing to teach that belonging to one another" is the challenge.[153]

In the individualistic context of American life, the biblical teachings regarding community are in direct opposition to the worldview of being concerned only about oneself. Christian discipleship grounds one "in a

community that transcends the individual. This community provides a belief set, a narrative framework for understanding spiritual experiences, and most importantly, a community outside of oneself that may confront and support one to develop a deeper, more complete relationship with the Divine."[154] Churches will need to struggle with how to teach the need for community and how to engage believers in community life.

Contextualization and Discipleship

Those who minister in cross-cultural settings and as missionaries in other cultures are aware of the need to contextualize in a particular culture. Some of the suggestions made in these writings are perhaps helpful for those of us who need to contextualize discipleship in a postmodern, post-Christian American culture. Minho Song in "Contextualization and Discipleship: Closing the Gap between Theory and Practice" argues that contextualization and discipleship are two concepts that cannot be separated. Quoting Dean Gilliland, he proposes that "it is the church that must 'challenge, incorporate and transform' the elements of cultures so as to bring those under the Lordship of Christ. Contextualization must be understood in a comprehensive manner, covering not only the areas of Bible translation, the expressions of worship, leadership structure, and so on, but also the very fabric of believers' commitment to and involvement in society as disciples of Jesus Christ."[155] In our evangelical tradition, we tend to focus on evangelism and then use packaged discipleship materials for spiritual formation. He argues that we should be as careful about packaging discipleship materials for those who desire to grow closer to Jesus as we do to carefully package the gospel message for the first-time hearer. This acknowledges that "no one comes to Jesus in a spiritual vacuum"[156] and that because the person who receives the message already has a worldview and established ideas and experiences, then "the mind must go through a fierce battle for biblical truths to be written on it."[157] In any culture, the discipler must ask, "What are the issues that stand in the way of the new believers from becoming mature disciples of Christ?"[158]

Contextualization in American churches today may demand the same types of contextualization considered in working in cross-cultural settings. Steeped in a worldview that rejects absolutes and challenges intolerance, the

church must address worldviews in opposition to biblical thinking and train new believers as the church has done in every generation.

Values and Moral Behavior

Probably the most challenging aspect of ministry in the future will not be related to population growth, cultural changes, church program changes, buildings, worship style, or evangelism. Instead, the greatest challenge may be the changing moral values of American culture. With the decline in the belief of absolute truth comes the lack of moral absolutes. As a result, relativism has become a core value. "The majority of Americans, therefore, either believes or yields to the belief that all moral truth is relative to the individual and his/her circumstances."[159] Barna and Hatch report Chuck Colson's statement that "the dominant American worldview of young adults can be summed up to one word: 'whatever.'"[160]

The Pew Forum's "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" report in 2008 indicated that 78% of American adults believed there are absolute standards of right and wrong, but only 29% of those relied mainly on their religious beliefs for these standards, instead relying primarily on practical experience and common sense.[161] The report also indicated that while the U.S. has avoided the secularizing trends seen in Europe, it also reported that about 16% of adults were unaffiliated with any religious tradition, up from previous decades.[162] The study concluded that religion continues to impact the private and public lives of most Americans, but "it remains to be seen how this trend toward secularization will ultimately impact religion in the U.S."[163]

Researcher George Barna reports that 83% of U.S. adults express concern about the moral condition of the nation, but overall results show a decline in morality using his measures. A majority of Americans believe that gambling, cohabitation, and sexual fantasies are morally acceptable, and almost half of the population also believes that having an abortion and having a sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex other than the spouse is morally acceptable. His findings also supported the differences in generations related to moral viewpoints. Listing ten moral behaviors,[164] he asked respondents to indicate which were "morally acceptable." In nearly every case, the younger generations (eighteen years to thirty-eight years) identified more behaviors as being morally acceptable, while the two oldest

generations emerged as those least likely to embrace the behaviors. Evangelicals were the least likely to accept each of the behaviors as moral; however, compared to previous years, even evangelical perspectives had changed.

As ministers who look toward the future of discipleship, it will be important to consider that while generations differ in their experiences and in their worldviews, the future of the church will demand that ministers address morality and worldview issues. Increases in cohabitation, abortion, pornography, sexual abuse, drug abuse, and other behaviors create monumental challenges for discipleship. Like Paul in Ephesians 5, today's disciples must learn to put off immorality, impurity, greed, filthiness, and drunkenness, and learn how to walk as children of light with goodness and righteousness and truth.

Conclusion

Many of us would say we do not like change; however, we cannot deny that some change is good. We enjoy the benefits of microwaves, hybrid cars, Bluray players, iPads, Kindles, Skype, iChat, Internet access to information, and perhaps electronic visual media in worship. On the other hand, some changes have negative potential: microwaves are harmful in some situations; hybrid cars are expensive to maintain; and mobile phones mean we are never disconnected and, as a result, maybe not fully connected with those with whom we are physically present. Most of the changes explored in this chapter are largely out of our control—population shifts, demographics, educational levels, and diversity. Others like multisite churches and different approaches to church programming are efficient and effective. They may simply be challenges to our old ways of thinking.

However, we should confront some changes and find ways to address them. The various chapters in this text provide ways to minister in specific age group contexts. Based on our current context, it will be important to find ways to reach out to diverse groups—young adults, the unchurched, and the dechurched, for example—as well as encourage them to be involved in a biblical community of faith. In addition, clear and intentional biblical teaching about moral issues will continue to be critical in the kingdom plan for discipleship in any generation. The early church faced similar challenges of teaching new believers who had no background for understanding the

Scriptures. These issues remind us that each generation must continue to make disciples, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded.

Discussion Questions

1. What changes have you observed in culture and in the church? How do these relate to the demographics reported in this chapter?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the observation that diversity will be a "nonissue" in the future? What evidence have you seen to support your position?
3. Describe the churches you have attended, including the size(s) and growth patterns. How would you describe the possible future of the church you currently attend?
4. Using Ed Stetzer's four categories, how would you describe the "unchurched" individuals that you know? What type of "outreach" do you think would appeal to them?
5. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of a "multisite" church situation as opposed to planting a new church. What are some things you would need to consider in making a decision between these two models?
6. What types of "worldview battles" would a new believer have to consider? What perspectives would need to be transformed in order to be in line with biblical truth?

For Further Reading

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Chapter 4



DESIGN FOR CHURCH DISCIPLESHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Royce A. Rose, Ph.D.

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, we have looked at the biblical and theological foundation for the church; the historical foundation of education and discipleship in the church; and the context, the people and their needs, in which the church must carry out God's mission. All of these factors are critical in designing church discipleship, whether in the modern world or the post-modern world.

The biblical and theological foundation helps us to understand why the church exists in the world and gives us a foundation on which to build, go, grow, and know. The history of how God has used the church to nurture and educate God's people lets us take advantage of the journey of the people of faith that are our "great … cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1). History lets us put our story in God's story. History shows us that the church changes as the world around it changes. The context of our activity as the body of Christ determines the ways and means of being God's people on mission. We are on mission in a particular place, at a particular time, with a particular people, and to a particular people.

History shows us that the church changes as the world around it changes.

Intentional Design: From Scripture to Structure

There are no immutable methods or practices in the work of the church, in the mission of the people of God. The practices of those who have gone before us were their practices in their time and place to the people God had called them to make into disciples. The ministry design of the first-century church worked well in the first century, although the Corinthian church had a different design than the church at Jerusalem. The ministry design of the church in the twentieth century worked well in the twentieth century, although the church in the southern tier of the United States had a different design than the church in post-imperial China or in Soviet-era Ukraine.

Design is a strategic plan for moving from our biblical, theological, historical, and cultural base to being who we are to be and doing that which we should be doing. Design is more than ethereal ideas, good intentions, or purpose statements. It may include all of those, but it is more. Design is not a program, but it includes programs or structures to carry out the strategic plan.

As the twenty-first century approached, Rick Warren helped us begin a conversation about what drives the church. Although Warren talked about a number of *drivers:* tradition, personality, finances, programs, events, and seekers,[165] the conversation usually deteriorated to *purpose driven* vs. *program driven.* One of the reasons was that Warren was in the Baptist tradition and Baptists had been strong "program" people. The mid-twentieth century found the heavily rural Southern Baptist Convention working to move all their churches to become *Four-Star* churches. That meant that each church needed to have Sunday School, Training Union, Woman's Missionary Union, and Baptist Brotherhood programs organized and functioning in the church. The assumption was that if you had the right programs and the right structure in the programs, the church would accomplish its purpose. The other side of the discussion stressed the purpose but often failed to come up with the program or structure that could accomplish the purpose. The missed point in this discussion is that, even if you were driven by the right purpose, there has to be a way to carry out that purpose. You need a structure, a plan, leadership, focus; you need a *program.*

Even if driven by the right purpose, there has to be a way to carry out that purpose; you need a program.

Ministry Design among Southern Baptists: A Case Study

One model of developing a ministry design is seen in the history of Southern Baptists during their days of rapid growth. Southern Baptist churches grew at phenomenal rates in the middle of the twentieth century. The culture of this denomination and the culture of the nation fed this growth. The one-hundred-year-old denomination had been moving toward organizational maturity at national, state, and associational levels during the first half of the twentieth century, expanding north and west throughout the fifty states and strengthening its foothold in the South. Programs had emerged in the churches during this era and were receiving acceptance and support from the denomination: Sunday School, a Bible study and outreach program; Training Union, initially a young adult discipling organization; Woman's Missionary Union, formed to support missions in the denomination; and Baptist Brotherhood, designed to mobilize laymen for missions. Each of these found their way into many of the churches and provided outreach, education, training, and avenues for service. By the middle of the century, churches were being encouraged to be "four-star" churches having all four of these programs.[166]

Eventually, the denomination reached a point of coordination that enabled the agencies that supported these programs to work together on a design that would be uniform across the denomination, a ministry design that every church could use. In a series of publications from 1963—1987, Southern Baptist leaders began to develop a design approach that was, in its essence, purpose driven.

Two books were published in 1963 that described this design—*The Nature and Functions of the Church* and *A Church Organized and Functioning*. Within these two small books, the authors outlined the nature of the New Testament church and the functions, or intentions, of the church. They moved from functions of the church, to tasks of the functions, to programs to carry out the tasks. They presented the church as a fellowship of believers and discussed the biblical basis for the church. The functions described in these first volumes were: worship, proclaim, educate, and minister.[167] These functions and this study of the church serve as a basis for the volumes that followed as well as texts written for training ministers in the work of the church. Howse and Thomason took the next step in the design process, listing tasks that grow out of the functions. These tasks are assigned to the church, to officers and leaders in the church, and to the

programs of the church. By this point, the “four-star” church had become the “five-star” church with Music Ministry joining the list of organized church programs.[168]

In 1969 as Southern Baptists and other denominations were realizing that the radical shift in the American culture was obviously affecting the church, Howse and Thomason revised their work, publishing under the hopeful title, *A Dynamic Church: Spirit and Structure for the Seventies.* In an attempt to address the changing culture and massive urbanization, they restate the biblical basis and spend a little time talking about the culture. They add one function to the four established in the previous book, suggesting that another function of the church is the *application* of our faith. They also added several other programs related to pastoral ministry and administrative ministries.[169]

Three levels of intention statements form the foundation for church work: mission, functions, tasks.

By 1980, the realization that growth had slowed and the cultural changes were more dynamic than first thought brought on the need for a new look at ministry design for this denomination. *A Church on Mission,* compiled by Reginald McDonough, offered some new insights. This approach looked at the cultural changes more realistically and focused on major priorities churches needed to address such as evangelism, family, and the work of the laity. The biblical study of the nature of the church was still there, but McDonough offered a slightly revised list of functions that are more robust: worship, proclaim and witness, nurture and educate, and minister. Gone was “application,” and additional weight was given to the priorities of witness and nurture.[170]

The final volume in this series provided a possible design approach that may be applicable in the church of the twenty-first century, both the modern and the post-modern, and in the traditional, the missional, the formational, the multicultural and intercultural, and the emergent. It is the result of trial and error in the life of this one denomination, the largest Protestant denomination in America. It is not a design that can be used now or in the future, but it is an approach to ministry design that can be used as a framework in the various contexts of the church today. Robert Orr in *Being God’s People* covers the biblical nature of the church and the needs of people

as did his predecessors, but he enlarges this design approach with a discussion of *basic intentions.* Orr suggests three levels of basic intention statements that form the foundation for the work of the church: mission, functions, and tasks. The mission gives a brief summary of the church's reason for being. It says who the church *is.* The functions are statements of intentions. They describe what the church intends to *do* because of who they *are.* Orr suggests the same four functions stated in McDonough. Finally, tasks are those specific intentions that define continuing activities that carry out the function.[171]

At this final stage Orr then launched into a description of the tasks that are assigned to be carried out by each program. At this point all of these volumes move into a prescribed set of programs that are supported by the denomination. This is where the failure of design entered the picture. Although Orr and others suggest that each church must address its own needs in what it does in ministry, the implication is that the programs listed, whether the four from the middle of the century or the fifteen listed in Orr's volume, are the ones that every church needs in order to accomplish the *tasks* that carry out the *functions* that, in turn, accomplish the *mission.*[172]

This is where the failure of design entered the picture.

This evolving approach of one major denomination is purpose driven (working from the mission); but it goes further than the design model needed in the twenty-first century by offering prescriptive programs to be uniformly applied across all church situations. Our challenge in thinking about a ministry design that is biblically solid and structurally flexible is finding what is essential and using that as a foundation to form the structure necessary to accomplish the unique purpose of *our* church, in *our* time, and in *our* place.

Components of Ministry Design

How can we take what we learn from this historical look at one denomination and develop an approach to ministry design that is not attached to one culture, one point in time, one denomination? How can we move from the prescriptive program—driven approach to discipleship ministry to a ministry design that is flexible, organic, breathing, and transformative?

Interpretive components. There are at least three interpretive components to a ministry design, components that inform us as we set out to design the ministry that is unique to our church. They are components that keep the larger picture in view. They are components that interpret the essence and influence of the world in which the ministry will function.

If you have read the preceding chapters of this section of the text you have considered these interpretive components. First, Denison has helped us study the biblical and theological basis of the church. It is from this component that we are able to develop our mission statement. It is the nature of what the church is and what the church should do that form this interpretive understanding of what *our* church is and what *our* church should do.

Second, Hedin has given us an historical perspective of the teaching church. We have seen how God used the church to teach and make disciples through the years, from the synagogue school to the Sunday School movement. Third, Hedin has also helped us understand the diverse context in which the church must accomplish discipleship. Unlike the case study described in "Ministry Design among Southern Baptists: A Case Study," one size no longer fits all. The context of each church is unique and calls for a different design.

One size no longer fits all.

The church in the twenty-first century cannot hope to develop a ministry design without considering these interpretive components that help us understand discipleship from biblical-theological, educational-historical, and contextual perspectives.

Intention components. As mentioned in "Ministry Design among Southern Baptists: A Case Study," Orr introduced three levels of intentions that are a part of the ministry design process.[173] As we studied the biblical and theological component, we asked, "What is the church?" and "What does the church do?" From these questions comes the next question: Considering the nature and purpose of the church, considering the needs of people in our church and community, considering the cultural context of our church, "What does *our* church intend to be and to do?"

Mission. The first level is the mission of the church. This is not the place to define, dissect, and differentiate the terms mission, purpose, and vision. The mission is a brief but comprehensive summary of the church's reason

for existence. This can be stated uniquely for your church or more broadly or generically for the larger church. We use the term mission here because it comes with a sense of "sending forth" or the responsibility of a purpose to be fulfilled. It is a dynamic concept. Some churches might choose a biblical statement as their mission—Scriptures such as one of the following or dozens of other passages:

What does our church intend to be and do?

> Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:8—11, NRSV).
>
> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18–20, NRSV).
>
> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18, NRSV).
>
> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:18–19, NRSV).

Any of these Scriptures provide understanding of the purpose, the mission, of the church. It is critical for a church to wrestle with Scripture, history,

needs of people, and culture to come to a statement of what they see as the mission of the church. It should be more than a brief slogan to be placed on a banner or brochure. It should encapsulate the full understanding of the mission of the people of God in this place and time. People should easily see in the statement, what the church *is* and what it intends to *do* because of what it is. Consider the following statements.

Tidwell authored this mission statement: "The purpose of the church is to be a fellowship of persons who have received Christ and who are attempting obediently to live the way of Christ to work faithfully with Him to bring others to God."[174] For a number of years, Southern Baptists used the following mission statement as the basis for curriculum and coordination:

> The mission of a church, composed of baptized believers who share a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, is to be a redemptive body in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, growing toward Christian maturity through worship, proclamation and witness, nurture and education, and ministry to the whole world that God's purpose may be achieved.[175]

In *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church, states Saddleback's purpose statement as: "To bring people to Jesus and membership in his family, develop them to Christlike maturity, and equip them for their ministry in the church and life mission in the world, in order to magnify God's name."[176]

None of these may be appropriate for your church. But you should be able to see, embedded in these statements, the second level of intentions: functions. In the Southern Baptist statement you see the four functions: worship; proclaim and witness; nurture and educate; and ministry. In the Saddleback statement you see the alliterated list: membership, maturity, ministry, mission, and magnify.

Functions. The second level of intention involves the functions of the church. These functions are activities that naturally grow out of the mission, activities that are characteristic of the nature of the church. These are the things the church does because of what the church is. The list that Orr and Tidwell worked with is: worship; nurture and educate; proclaim and witness; and minister. Other lists include application, fellowship, discipleship, and

evangelism. Let's briefly look at these first four as they are explained by Tidwell and then ask some questions about these.

Worship includes both corporate and individual experiences. Worship is the believer's basic encounter with God both in the corporate setting of a worship service in the church and in the individual setting of private devotion or formation exercises. The corporate worship experience is essential to developing the fellowship of believers as a family of faith.

Functions are the things the church *does* because of what the church *is.*

Proclaim and witness is the natural response of the Christian. Telling, proclaiming Christ to others is a natural response to the transforming experience of salvation. It is also a command of Christ. This function, however, is larger than witnessing or preaching. It is both the verbal witness and the witness of the Christian lifestyle. Within this function is evangelism and Christian ethics. It is what we say to people about our experience with Christ and the way we live in the world that gives testimony to the transforming power of Christ in our life. These two forms of witness go together so that what we say and the way we live are consistent with the life and teachings of Christ.

Nurture and educate speak of the process and content. The function of the church is to nurture individuals as they grow and develop, as they become like Christ. Later chapters in this text will deal with the formation of people at various ages and stages of life. The attention to spiritual and faith formation in the church's ministry has grown tremendously over the past two decades. Education focuses more on knowledge but is more than indoctrination. It focuses on bringing out the latent, God-given capabilities of persons. Education exposes the believer to Scripture, beliefs, and practices of their faith appropriate for their level of readiness. Education equips persons to pursue knowledge of their faith for themselves.

Minister is doing needful and helpful things in the name of Christ, through His power, in His Spirit, and for His glory. This function is modeled throughout the Gospels in the way Christ ministered. The church ministers by helping people not because they are potential believers, not because they are potential church members, not because of what the church may get from them, but because they need help and because Christ commands it.[177]

As you look at these four functions, consider the following questions:

- Is one of these more important than any one or all of the others?
- Are these functions interrelated? Do they support or depend on each other?
- Is there anything else a church should be doing that is not included in these four functions?
- Is there anything that your church is currently doing that cannot be included in these four functions?
- Can any of these four be omitted?

In designing ministry, your church must go through the process of deciding what their intentions are and what functions they believe should be included in their ministry design.

Tasks. We have gone from the overarching mission statement of the church to more specific functions that show what the church intends to do. Tasks take this process one level further. Tasks are specific enough that the church can cluster a group of these tasks, assign them to a ministry program, and determine the resources (leadership, time, space, funds) that will be needed to accomplish the tasks.

We closed the case study described in "Ministry Design among Southern Baptists: A Case Study" with the note that the design used by that convention became inadequate for the twenty-first century because it proposed a prescriptive approach, supposedly applicable to every church in every circumstance. When it came to tasks, this model listed fifty-seven tasks divided into fifteen programs.[178] Few if any churches followed this model to this level. The sheer size and complexity of the tasks and programs were inadequate when applied to many church sizes, locations, cultural identities, and structures.

As you develop the tasks needed in your church, you must look at all of the components we have discussed: the interpretive and the intentional. You must think about your theological and biblical understandings, the history of the church, the context of your community, your mission statement, and your determined functions. From this you begin to list the specific tasks or actions that are needed for your church to accomplish the functions and mission.

If nurture and educate is one of your functions, then determine what tasks are needed to complete that function. Will you need to teach the Bible? Will you need to equip Christians for discipleship and personal ministry? Will you need to lead members to worship? Each of these is a specific task that can be assigned to leaders to accomplish.

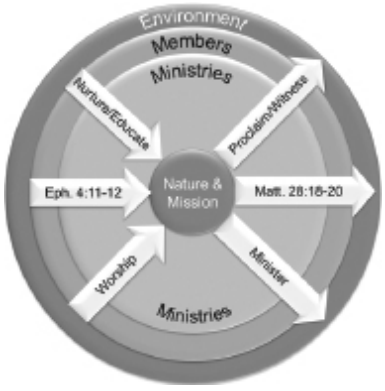
Your list may be 57 tasks, or 10 tasks, or 150 tasks. It depends on what you determine is necessary to accomplish the mission of your church. As you evaluate each of the tasks, you will find natural groupings of tasks that could be clustered and developed into one ministry that would organize to accomplish those tasks. For example, you may develop a small group ministry that takes on tasks related to teaching the Bible, forming faith, and ministering to member needs.

Ministry Models

Church model. There is no single, universal model for ministry that fits all churches. It is not our attempt to provide such a model but to offer some ways to visualize the design elements presented above. Figure 1 attempts to offer an understanding of the dynamic nature of the design process. This diagram is based on a similar model presented by Hardee.[179]

In this diagram (Figure 1), the nature and mission of the church is in the center. We have already discussed where this comes from: our biblical and theological study and the needs of people. This represents a stable, nonchanging core to the design. On the outer edge is the environment. This is the culture in which the church is attempting to accomplish her mission. This environment changes constantly. In between the changing environment and the stable nature and mission of the church, are the members and ministries of the church. The members and ministries are not confined to the world or the church but rather live in the interaction between the two.

Figure 1



The diagram takes as an example the four functions that were described in the case study. The arrows represent the interaction of the members and

ministry between the world and the church. Worship and nurture/educate are functions that primarily build and strengthen the members. Ephesians 4:11–12 describes the role of pastors and teachers as one of equipping the believers for their work of ministry. Members come into the church to receive training, to worship, to be nurtured in faith. The other two functions —proclaim/witness and minister—provide a way for members, once equipped, to go out on mission to minister and proclaim the Gospel. This is represented by the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).

Ministries are designed to enable this interaction to take place. Some ministries provide a structure for the inward functions, and some provide a structure for the outward functions. It is possible that you will have ministries that encompass both inward and outward functions. This would depend on the tasks assigned to a particular ministry.

A discipleship ministry model. Another way to visualize ministry design is through this evolving discipleship model (Figures 2—4). The church begins with one ministry that is designed to provide *basic* discipleship (Figure 2). It mainly addresses the nurture and educate function. This program is designed to accomplish a cluster of three tasks: teach the Bible, reach people for Christ and Bible study, and minister to the needs of people. Some churches may call this Sunday School, Small Group, Growth Group, Cell, or any number of appropriate names. The structure and leadership for this ministry can be easily determined with responsibilities assigned and leaders trained and equipped for each task. This may be the only ministry or program the church has in the educational area.

Figure 2



Next, assume the church wanted to add another ministry to provide a means of equipping and sending people out in ministry and missions (Figure 3). This ministry or program would go beyond ministering to the needs of people in the group, focusing more on engaging in a missional task. This adds to the single basic discipleship program and turns the focus from an

inward function of nurture and educate to an outward function of minister. This would make *going* disciples. In this ministry, people would use the basic ministry skills they learned from Bible study and add to that a study of missions or the missional assignment of the church. They would learn about ministering to the needs and hurts of people in the world around them and around the world. They would study compassion and justice and then practice it. The tasks of this ministry might be: study missional Scripture, pray for people in the community, engage in ministry in the community and around the world, and advocate for the marginalized. Adding this additional ministry to the basic discipleship ministry provides exponential increase in accomplishing the functions and the mission of the church. Because it builds on the basic discipleship ministry, it increases the educational base and the scope of ministry. The defined tasks allow the church to develop leadership and structure for this ministry or program.

Figure 3



Now, let's assume that the church, instead of wanting to add a missional ministry, wants to add a ministry or program that will make *reproducing* disciples (Figure 4). In this case the proclaim and witness function will be the focus. This program takes members from the *basic* discipling ministry and builds on their training and experience in reaching people for Christ and Bible study. By expanding their understanding of the evangelistic emphasis in Scripture, this program will train members how to share their faith in personal evangelism. By expanding on the lifestyle witness, this program will train members to live the Christian life: to act ethically and morally in their home, school, and workplace. They will plan relational opportunities in their community to provide a setting for sharing their faith and for living their faith. The tasks of this program might be: teach biblical evangelism, engage in personal witness, reach persons for Christ through community events, and teach biblical ethics. The church would develop leaders and

provide resources and structure for the new program based on the tasks that are assigned to the program. Again, this would increase the base of education and expand the ministry of the church.

Figure 4



In some cases, if the basic discipleship program were effective and these disciples were growing and maturing in their faith and commitment, if they were really understanding and applying what they learn from Scripture, if they were gaining a passion to meet needs and reach people, then they would be demanding more opportunities to carry out the mission of the church and the church would find expanding these educational programs and ministries to be a natural outgrowth of the basic discipleship ministry. Thus, a church might decide to have three ministry programs to address the area of discipleship: a basic program for everyone, all ages, that addresses tasks of reaching, teaching, and ministry; a missions program or ministry that equips and sends people out to minister in the community and the world; and a ministry of witness that equips people to share their faith verbally and in the way they live (Figure 5). The principle is that the broader you build the educational (teaching) base, the more comprehensive you are at accomplishing the tasks, functions, and mission of the church.

Figure 5



This illustration shows the design of a cluster of ministries that *produce fully devoted* disciples. The same model could be built around worship and faith formation, starting with an initial ministry of corporate worship and building additional ministry programs to address the full gambit of worship and formation.

Flexible Application

As stated previously, *design is a strategic plan for moving from our biblical, theological, historical, and cultural base to being who we are to be and doing that which we should be doing.* We are suggesting that the basic elements of the design process, the *interpretive* and the *intentional* components, are needed in any design. But these elements vary depending on the church and its unique culture, just as Hedin, in an earlier chapter, discussed the context of discipleship. We will look through two lenses in this discussion, one cultural and the other demographic.

Culture. At least since Niebuhr's classic text *Christ and Culture* discussed the various relationships that could exist between the church and the culture, students of the church have been interested in culture.[180] Understanding culture seems to be critical in determining how the church must carry out her work. Two cultural transitions or shifts that affect the church appear in the literature: Christendom/post-Christendom and modern/post-modern. Christendom began with the conversion of Constantine (AD 313) and lasted through the 1950s. The modern era is usually pegged just before the Renaissance through the mid-twentieth century. Gibbs and Bolger provide a distinction between the two transitions: "Whereas Christendom provided institutional confidence, modernity provided an epistemological certainty based on foundationalism."[181] Both of these aspects apply to our discussion of design as we include biblical, historical, theological, and contextual aspects, as well as structure.

Remember that the context of the church and the structure of most churches are in transition. Mead writes of the time between paradigms.[182] Noticing the time of transition from the Apostolic age to Christendom and the time of transition from pre-modern to modern, we must assume that the *time between* may be longer than any of our lifetimes. This is, indeed, where most churches and church leaders find themselves: in the in-between. This is why it is critical for the church to study its interpretive and intentional

components carefully. The mission, functions, and tasks of the church living mostly in modernity will differ significantly from the church living mostly in post-modernity.

Even interpretive components vary in these changing cultures. Sweet in *The Church in the Emerging Culture* uses change in method and message to describe differing approaches to church in these transitional times.[183] Some churches may seek little change in message and little change in method (Orthodox and Reformed) while others seek change in both method and message (Emerging). These views affect the theological foundation a church will use in developing its mission. The important key to remember is that every church is different and the design must grow out of and reflect these differences.

Demographics. Size and location of churches affect both the interpretive and intentional components of design. The smaller-membership church is often a single-cell church. The uniqueness of this facet determines how they interpret their theology and context. It will impact the way they see their mission and functions and most certainly the structure they create to accomplish their mission and functions. These churches may be more tribal or family in nature. So the process for determining the design will be more organic, personal, and inclusive. In the larger, multicell church, the design might be more corporate, structured, and individual. The components of the design will be consistent, but the application very different.

Churches in rural settings create another context, different from their urban and suburban neighbors. Rural society operates at a different pace, often more in tune with agricultural seasons. This sequence of life and ways of relating to each other and nature will affect the components of the design.

We have tried to offer a set of components that can be used by churches in any situation to develop their discipleship ministry. However, each church will end up with their own ministry or ministries that fulfill the mission that the church has determined, through the leadership of the Spirit, is the mission that they are to fulfill. Their functions and tasks will grow out of that mission and purpose. All of this will be built on a foundation of their understanding of Scripture, their theology, and their understanding of the needs of people in their context.

Discussion Questions

1. Define ministry design.
2. Why do you think the design of the denomination in the case study failed in today's culture?
3. Which of the three interpretive components of design do you think is most evident in your current church ministry design?
4. Write a mission statement for your church. Begin, "The mission of (name of your church) is…"
5. Make a list of the functions you feel are appropriate for your church.
6. Name one ministry in your church. List the tasks you think have been assigned to that ministry.
7. What cultural and demographic factors most affect your church?

PART 2

What Does a Disciple Look Like?



Chapter 5



SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Thomas Sanders, Ph.D.

Increasingly, spiritual formation has become a topic of discussion—a reemphasis, or a new focus in both Christian and secular education. Parker Palmer extended this discussion of spirituality into the public areas of education through his early text, *To Know as We Are Known: Spirituality of Education* (1983). Seminaries and Christian colleges who educate students in preparation for service inside and outside of church are designing curricula and courses related to spiritual formation and even designating faculty members to focus on spiritual formation. Journal articles and new journals are being sponsored in order to draft a working relationship between what is termed spiritual formation and Christian education and ministry—even to the point that some might suggest changing the name of Christian education to Christian spiritual formation.

In looking for a working definition, James Wilhoit in *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* defines Christian spiritual formation as "the intentional communal progress of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit."[184] In this definition, Wilhoit focuses on the five aspects. The first is the intentional nature of activities that bring about spiritual formation rather than random experiences of life. In addition, he brings attention to the place of formation—the community of worship, service, and practice. The nature and the place of spiritual formation lead to a discussion of the process that moves beyond the terms of a program but

speaks to a lifelong journey. For Wilhoit, Christian spiritual formation is dependent on a relationship with Jesus Christ, but this formation is powered by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Other definitions of spiritual formation in the Christian context create a distinction between spiritual formation and transformation. Transformation is how the Holy Spirit remolds the heart, mind, individual, and society; spiritual formation is how we as leaders might facilitate that formation in our lives and the lives of others.[185] In each of these definitions, the focus is on the individual, small group, church, and beyond, but they also seem to focus on instruction, experience, and the process of conversion. Which of those foundational experiences, teachings, and relationships are used by the Holy Spirit to bring about conversion and ongoing transformation? If spiritual formation is the key organizing principle of Christian education, then should we not be concerned with the preliminary aspects and antecedent conditions that are instrumental in the point and process of conversion, transformation, and spiritual formation?[186]

Louis B. Hanks in *Vision, Variety, and Vitality* looks at the span of spiritual formation through various stages he deems as the "Biblical Dimensions of the Spiritual Life." He describes the stages as Innocence, Secular, Seeker, Conversion, Believer, Follower, and Discipler. He affirms that the Holy Spirit is at work in each stage or dimension while individuals are being taught foundational concepts that prepare themselves for more advanced understandings and responses. One of his assumptions is that the spiritual growth of a person is influenced by the person's level of mental, emotional, and social development including church and family relationships. The early stages of innocence refer "to those who have not yet become accountable for their sins."[187] In the secular dimension, individuals become accountable but choose to follow their own ways instead of God's way. Hanks implores the church to assist individuals in becoming aware of the characteristics, reality, and consequences of sin. In the final preconversion dimension, he describes a time when the individual becomes sensitive to the gospel and begins to struggle with both sin and purpose in life. For Hanks, these critical preconversion dimensions are times of intentional involvement by Christians working with the Holy Spirit to aid in conversion and transformation.

In a similar way, Bruce Powers describes "The Phases of Faith Development." He identifies the following five phases as

- Nurture (ages 0–6),
- Indoctrination (ages 7–18),
- Reality Testing (ages 19–27),
- Making Choices (ages 28–35), and
- Active Devotion (ages 36-up).[188]

Powers discusses the relationships and early images of the Nurture stage. A few key words for this phase are influence, affection, and values. These all relate to Christian parents and leaders at church who help the child in early childhood begin to identify with and value Jesus, God, church, and the Bible. In the Indoctrination phase, the emphasis moves from relationships to biblical concepts and memorization of Scripture by and from individuals whom the child respects. He speaks of both of these phases as significant in helping the child in understanding and sensing the what, why, and how of the child's conversion and faith development.

Both Hanks's and Powers's depictions of the casual and planned life experiences that form the antecedent to conversion and transformation argue for a view of Christian spiritual formation that includes those years prior because the church and church leaders can be a part of planning ministry design that provides the best opportunity for individuals of all ages to experience conversion. This view is not new. Horace Bushnell argued that parents and those in close relationships should guide children to know and trust God at an early age to avoid traumatic experiences with sin.[189] While Baptists and other groups branded Bushnell a heretic, by the 1950s Findley Edge said this of Baptists and Bushnell: "However, in recent years, with our emphasis on the Christian home, with our emphasis on enrolling babies, with our 'centers of interest' approach to teaching in elementary departments, we perhaps are utilizing the Christian Nurture approach as effectively as any other religious group."[190] The phases or dimensions before conversion offer opportunities for Christian Education.

An Understanding of Conversion in Spiritual Formation

When looking at the issue of conversion as it relates to spiritual formation, it is essential to define the meaning of conversion; unfortunately the literature in this area contains a significant amount of variance. In most views, conversion is more than a simple affirmation of institutional belonging or

altering of one's religious affiliation. Conversion means a change. "Conversion transforms the way the individual perceives the rest of society and his or her personal place in it, altering one's view of the world."[191] Starbuck is more specific in his work, saying that it is characterized by more or less sudden changes of character—from evil to goodness, from sinfulness to righteousness, and from indifference to spiritual insight and activity.[192] William James built on this definition in 1902. He stated that as a result of the person's conversion "religious ideas, peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual center of his energy."[193] In *The Psychology of Religion,* George Coe gives a four-part model for conversion that provides the framework for most empirical studies. Coe suggests:

> First, conversion is a profound change in self. Second, the change is not simply a matter of maturation, but is typically identified with the process (sudden or gradual) by which the transformed self is achieved. Third, this change in self is radical in its consequences—indicated by such things as a new centering of concern, interest, and action. Fourth, this new sense of self is perceived as "higher" or as an emancipation from previous dilemma or predicament.[194]

The biblical description of conversion includes changes in belief, behavior, worldview, and emotion. The convert must change his or her beliefs. Conversion in this manner has a propositional aspect where beliefs are articulated with mouth and heart as in Romans 10:9. In the same way, a change of behavior is suggested by the "fruit of the spirit" as written in Galatians 5:22—23.[195] There is some argument about whether behavior or belief comes first in conversion. Most traditional views of conversion demonstrate belief first, but those who argue the counterpoint contend that new converts act according to prescribed behaviors for new converts, and then beliefs are internalized. They observe that converts establish acts according to patterns of behavior that lead to beliefs. For example, some might argue that John Wesley's conversion depended on the disciplines of Methodism in cultivation of his beliefs.[196] The biblical characterization of conversion also includes a change in worldview. The converts not only

change their view of themselves but also of the world around them. Also, there is a change in emotion. The despair, often associated with preconversion, is replaced by joy and a sense of well-being.[197]

In America during the 1700–1800s, a declaration of faith or conversion had become increasingly normative with Protestants, including Puritans/Congregationalists.[198] With the emphasis on children among Protestants during the revival movement of this time, Congregational pastor and writer Horace Bushnell articulated that there was no need for children to suffer a traumatic conversion experience, but that children should experience small conversions throughout their Christian development and education.[199] In this time period of the early and mid-1800s, many parents did not teach their children to pray, and neither did they encourage them to read Scripture until conversion. The concepts of depravity of man and the radical regeneration brought by conversion fueled these beliefs. In order to prepare the child for this radical change, parents focused on the child's mistakes, failures, and sins rather than on the positive aspects of the boy's or girl's choices. Calvinists responded by claiming that parents who taught their children to act like and to consider themselves Christians are presuming on the sovereignty of God; for only God decides who the elect will be.[200]

Bushnell's classic book *Christian Nurture* argues that parents must teach their children from the earliest days to love and follow God, therefore limiting the impact and consequences of sin in later life. He did not foster the idea that children would not sin, but that they would sin less if raised under Christian parents who lived out the sacrifice of Christ in their daily lives.[201] Bushnell's de-emphasis on a traumatic conversion was initially controversial among Baptists. Baptist leader John A. Broadus (1827–1895), professor at (and then president of) The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, especially railed against a gradual or process approach to conversion.[202] Fifty years later, Baptist educators saw the two concepts of nurture and evangelism as more compatible because they saw teaching through Sunday School as the means for laying foundations for conversion.[203] However, outside Baptist arenas, this combination was adopted at the turn of the century. The Nurture approach is cited often as a rationale for the evangelism and conversion of children because it affords proponents of child evangelism the opportunity to convert a child with less emotion or regret and remorse later in life. In this method the child makes an acknowledgement of personal

responsibility to God and a request for forgiveness for a short life of sin rather than a more corrupted one later on.[204]

Like Bushnell, G. Stanley Hall was concerned with faith and conversion. He gave a series of lectures at Harvard in 1881 on these topics. He strongly encouraged the field of psychology to consider the phenomenon of conversion and published a two-volume treatise entitled *Jesus, the Christ, in Light of Psychology* (1917). Similar lectures and emphasis speckled the academic landscape due largely to the revival movement at the turn of the twentieth century.[205] At this time, Edward Starbuck published *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Study of Religious Consciousness* (1900). The study was based on interviews with 192 individuals (120 female and 72 males). Almost all were Protestants, with Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians among the largest groups.

Starbuck's study, while with adults who reflected on the phenomena of conversion, indicated a mean age of conversion at age sixteen. The age range of conversions was for the most part from age seven to twenty, with a rapid decline after age twenty and few conversions after age thirty.[206] One of the elements that is intriguing about this early work is that many of the comments are recorded from the questions as examples of the respondent's understanding or condition before, during, or after the phenomena of conversion. Starbuck's questions provide a baseline when considering questions to use but are too general for use with children. However, they do afford a framework for creating a child-friendly version to use with children, parents/guardians, and other significant adults in their conversion and faith formation.

Sudden or Gradual Forms of Conversion

The archetypical model influencing most considerations of conversion is the Pauline conversion experience on the road to Damascus.[207] James Richardson states that Paul's experience was "sudden, dramatic, and emotional."[208] He provides characteristics of this phenomenon as more emotional than rational, with the convert as a more passive agent influenced by external forces. Richardson also details a dramatic transformation of the individual, which moves from behavioral changes to changes in belief. In this paradigm, conversion occurs once and is permanent. Richardson also

suggests that the Pauline type of conversion occurs typically during adolescence and is sudden rather than gradual.[209]

Other researchers look at the Pauline conversion experience a little differently. John Drakeford makes a case that the sudden conversion of Paul was built on the gradualness of a series of events beginning with the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:58 and continued until the visit of Ananias on Straight Street in Acts 9:17. In his final argument, Drakeford combines the sudden view of conversion with the gradual view in exclaiming that they are different sides of the same coin. He postulates that both exist in all conversions but that one is often more apparent than the other.[210] In a similar fashion, Starbuck discovered more than one hundred years ago that there were often antecedent events that led to conversion experiences. He states:

> Although we have seen the spontaneous-awakening type of conversion to be the most frequent, there is not a single instance of this type in which there have not been some antecedents in thought or action which may be regarded as the “causes” leading to the awakening.[211]

Drakeford and Starbuck demonstrate that even sudden conversions follow some antecedent event or episode.

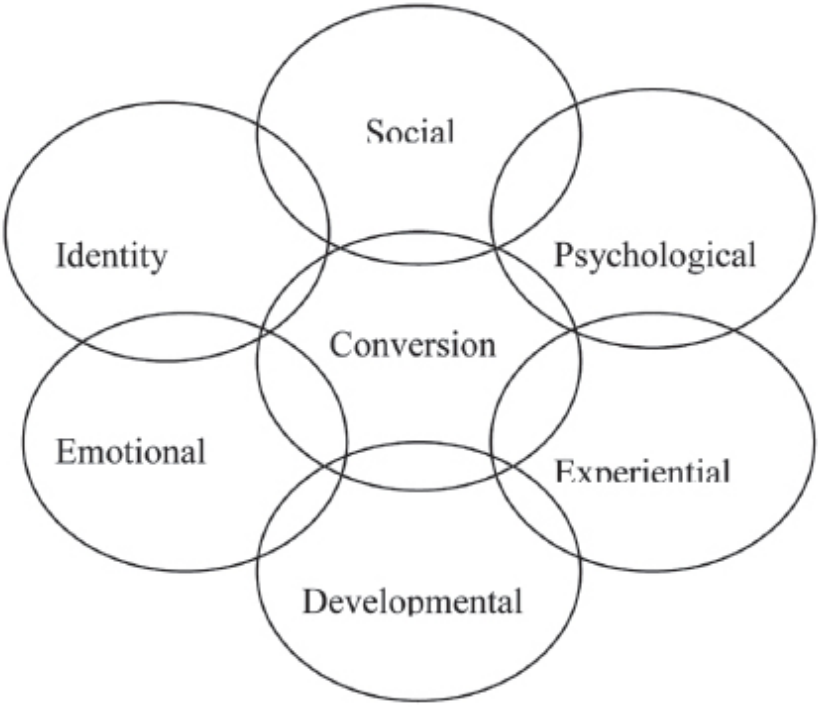
The sudden form of conversion could also be deemed a crisis form of conversion.[212] This crisis conversion begins with some period of confusion, unrest, or conflict, although these feelings or tension may be largely subconscious. This occurrence can also be the result of previous factors like earlier religious teaching or beliefs. Feelings the person may experience during this time are guilt, incompleteness, or loss of purpose. To assume that these feelings are always related to guilt and sin may be an overstatement. Starbuck in 1900 and Pratt in 1908 discovered cases where conviction of sin and guilt were not significant influences in conversion. Sometimes they found a feeling of incompleteness, which, as Walter Clark states, is another way of speaking of feelings related to sin.[213]

As for the motivations for conversion beyond sin, Starbuck lists several reasons given by his participants: fear of death or hell; self-regarding motives; altruistic motives; following out a moral ideal; remorse; conviction of sin; response to teaching; example; imitation; and social pressure.[214] Snow and Machalek combine these aspects with other research to create the

following categories: responses to coercion and induced stress; predisposing personality traits and cognitive orientations; situational factors; predisposing social attributes; and social influences.[215] Gillespie pulls these motivations and influences together to create a diagram of conversion that demonstrates the interrelationships of contexts in the fabric of conversion.[216]

The model titled “The Contexts of Conversion” provides a visual understanding of the contexts of conversion with both internal and external influences for the convert. The contexts not only speak of motivations but also of influences. The model also is a way of assessing the strongest and the weakest influences on conversion.[217]

The Contexts of Conversion



Source: V Bailey Gillespie. *The Dynamics of Religious Conversion.* Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1991.

After considering the motivations of conversion and the moment of illumination, the next stage results in a climactic surrender of self. Examples of these types of conversions include St. Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Wesley.[218] The next phase is described as a feeling of inner peace and inner harmony. For Clark, the last stage is as important as the first three, because

without the last stage in his line of reasoning, conversion is only superficial and lacks permanence. It is in this stage that the converts make a concrete expression of their conversion and begin to be included in a group of supportive believers.[219] John Wesley, and later George Whitfield, came to the conclusion that evangelizing without some plan for systematic training and inclusion for the converts was neglectful and would lead to what Hendricks would call "stillbirths" instead of "rebirths."[220]

Classic or Contemporary Forms of Conversion

Researchers like Richardson, Lofland, and Skonovd are arguing from their works that the Pauline model of conversion prevalent in the Revival era of the past is actually changing and is moving conversion from a process that is sudden to a more gradual development.[221] They contend that it is occurring as old as late adolescence and as early as childhood. They also postulate that conversion is less stern in regards to theology and that the motivational force for conversion is not release from sin and guilt but a search for meaning and purpose. In this characteristic, the convert is more active in the process than in a Pauline paradigm. It also moves the role of the convert to a search for purpose rather than conviction from the Holy Spirit.[222] The following is a comparison of the classic view of conversion that was the result of research conducted by Starbuck and others more than a century earlier.[223] The more contemporary view had been established by more recent research.[224]

Comparison of Views of Conversion

Classic View of Conversion	Contemporary View of Conversion
• Conversion is sudden • Occurs during middle adolescence to late adolescence • Emotional, suggestive • Stern theology • Convert is passive • Conversion is a release of sin and guilt	• Conversion is gradual • Occurs during late adolescence to early adulthood • Intellectual, rational • Compassionate theology • Convert is active • Conversion is a search for meaning and purpose

Source: Bernard Spilka, et al. *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach.* New York: Guilford Press, 2003.

While revivalism as a method for evangelism and conversion has declined and conversion may be morphing into a new form, parts of this trend from the aforementioned researchers seem counter to the trends toward the younger age of converts found among Southern Baptists of the last part of the twentieth century until now.[225]

In looking deeper at the conversion experience, Lewis Rambo suggests a stage model for conversion. The first stage involves an understanding of the microcontext and macrocontext of the convert. The macrocontext suggests the national culture of the early 1900s that was strongly influenced by revivalism. The microcontext reveals that culture of the immediate world of family and ethnicity. It is tempting to focus on the individual and forget the context of the conversion experience. The second stage is the crisis. Rambo says, “During the crisis, myths, rituals, symbols, goals, and standards cease to function well for the individual or culture.”[226] Rambo goes on to describe the two forms of crisis. The first is the life-changing experience that questions one’s fundamental direction. The second and milder form of crisis is the “straw that breaks the camel’s back": an event in a long line of previous events that pushes the convert into crisis.[227]

The next stage in Rambo’s conversion model is the quest. The quest stage of conversion is supported by the work of Richardson (1985) and Straus (1979). Straus states that the conversion experience is not a terminal act but must involve a day-to-day living of the decisions. For Christians, he says this involves immersing oneself in Bible study, fellowship with other believers, and a devotion to prayer.[228] All these elements make up the quest. In the continuation of the model of conversion, the quest stage leads the convert to the encounter stage. The convert encounters the advocate. This advocate could be a minister, Christian friend, missionary, or Bible study leader. A relationship begins where the advocate is attempting to bring the convert into relationship with the group. This does not mean the relationship is charismatic or dramatic. According to the findings, in most cases the relationship can be described as friendship—where the converts discover love and care that may allow them to construct a more positive life experience.[229]

As the stage model develops, the convert becomes involved with the group of believers through interaction. It is during this time that the convert moves beyond the actual events of the conversion to identification with the group. After building relationships with primary individuals, the convert

begins to identify with the group and then moves to make a public commitment. This is followed by the last stage of consequences. According to Rambo, the consequences are often a direct result of the nature of the conversion.[230]

Beyond the extremes of Classic or Contemporary, there are other descriptions or motifs for conversion. Lofland and Skonovd suggest that there are six motifs of conversion including Intellectual, Mystical, Experimental, Affectional, Revivalist, and Coercive. The researchers suggest that these motifs cut across the classic and contemporary models, providing a clearer understanding of the circumstance of the conversion. From their research, Lofland and Skonovd (1981) provide identifiers that indicate the amount of social pressure used, the duration of the conversion, and the impact on emotions, behavior, and beliefs.

Meadow and Kahoe (1984) mention several types of conversion beyond the Classic or Contemporary. The first that they describe is based on the research of William James (1902) and Starbuck (1900). Both researchers discovered religious people who never experienced conversion. These individuals experienced religious development that was unremarkable, and according to Starbuck, they exhibited growth without transition. Starbuck suggests that this form of conversion occurs due to the child's "religious surroundings [being] kept reasonably free from dogma which they are incapable of assimilating" and "the needs of the child being carefully met at every point in its development."[231]

This is also what many researchers describe as the approach of Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* (1848), but Bushnell does not rule out the occurrence of smaller conversions or of a crisis conversion in the lives of some individuals. Meadow and Kahoe term this form as "unconscious conversion."

The Unconscious Conversion and Multiple Conversions

The idea that a person might not have a significant conversion is at one extreme of the spectrum, and at the other end is the concept that individuals may have numerous conversions. According to Meadow and Kahoe, not only can people have multiple conversions but also the experience may be programmed. These researchers looked at groups like Southern Baptists where the process of conversion is institutionalized into curriculum, events,

and revivals so that the individual realizes that the decision to be converted is an expectation of the culture. They acknowledge that these conversions can be volitional as well as a mere ritual or formality.[232]

In *Stages of Faith,* James Fowler deals with conversion even though his definition for faith is not uniquely Christian. He sets out to discuss faith from both his research and the research of others like Kohlberg, Erikson, and Piaget as a series of stages throughout life. He stipulates that not everyone will reach the highest levels of faith. Within his stages, Fowler makes a place for a type of conversion, but instead of an emphasis on sinfulness and a need for a Savior, his definition of conversion deems it as either a change in content of faith or an intense or deeper commitment. From his interviews, his theory allows that this type of in-depth experience may occur prior to the change in stages, or it may precipitate a change in stage.[233] Published in the same year as Fowler's work, James Loder in *The Transforming Moment* (1981) discusses what he calls *convictional experiences*. Loder believes that most growth occurs not during the stages of development but between the stages where conflict occurs. This conflict calls for a knowing response. The search for resolution to the conflict is both conscious and unconscious. According to this research, imagination transforms the person's world with a new way of thinking and, therefore, energy is released, creating a feeling of unburdening. As a result of this new insight or process, the individual feels a more intimate and deeper connection with self and God. Further interpretation may continue, often resulting in a public display of commitment.[234]

Spiritual Formation beyond Conversion

Within the fall 2010 Christian Education Journal, Robert Pazmino explores the relationship between Christian education and spiritual formation. He argues that to understand the relationships between the two, we must be concerned with "*content* addressing information, *persons* addressing formation, and *context* addressing transformation."[235] The content of spiritual formation begins with a focus on the Bible. Some may argue that the scope of all content related to spiritual formation begins and ends with Scripture. In viewing Scripture as the content of spiritual formation, there are risks in how individuals may use the Bible in teaching.

At times, the Bible is referred to as a textbook, especially in a Sunday School model of Christian education. Pazmino's use of the word "information" almost suggests a textbook approach to the Scripture. Yes, there is a need for Christians at all ages to be informed and literate in the Scriptures, but this is not the end or goal of instruction. Jesus challenged the religious leaders of His day. Many of them had much of the Torah memorized and could recall portions with legalistic zeal, but they failed to connect on a deeper level with the foundations of the Old Testament. The content of spiritual formation is rooted in knowledge and comprehension of the Scripture, but focusing only on the cognitive aspects of spiritual formation and Scripture is one dimensional. Instruction must lead to transformation.[236]

Another approach to the use of Scripture in spiritual formation and Christian education is to treat it as a handbook for life application. In these instances short pericopes are plucked from the biblical record and used to demonstrate how Christians should act or behave. These selections may be didactic passages from James that refer to the use of the tongue or narrative passages that speak to taking a courageous stand like Daniel and his refusal to stop daily prayers. B. F. Skinner and Albert Bandura, self-described behaviorists, made popular the approach of shaping behavior by reinforcements in the 1960s. In a behaviorist's approach, the Scripture becomes a reinforcement or even model for action. There is certainly no problem with seeing Scripture as describing and prescribing specific patterns for the disciples of Christ. The problem with this approach is when Scripture is limited to only being a handbook for right behavior. When it is merely formulas or recipes for daily living, its impact on the whole being of the Christian is limited. The Bible is not a book of moralistic tales lived by heroes with incredible ability. The Bible is first and foremost a revelation of God. To focus only on the humans in the story is to miss the relationship with the Creator and Redeemer.

The last myopic approach to using Scripture is when it is seen as emotional support or encouragement alone. Scripture has the power to touch the lives of individuals who are hurting. The Psalms demonstrate that the follower of God can both cry out to God for help and cry out at God in crisis. The Bible can be both effective and affective in impacting Christian formation. Again, seeing the Holy Scripture as a feel-good book to use in times of crisis or the promotion of self is to see the book as a support for a

form of human narcissism. Scripture must be seen as a mysterious text that holds the power to change the heart, the head, and the body. The call of those who lead in the spiritual formation of others must be to engage followers of Christ personally in a way that draws them daily to the practice of reading, reverence, relevance, and relationship instead of an overreliance on predetermined outcomes that only speak to one part of formation. We should call on fellow Christians to rely on the Holy Spirit to speak to them not only through the speakers and leaders of corporate or small group experience but a direct message from God through the words of the Bible.

Many significant media advances have been made. The capability to project the living words on a screen for an entire congregation is a powerful and dynamic tool in spiritual formation and education. On the other hand, the ease of use may mean that the only person or persons tangibly handling Scripture are the people on the stage leading the worship or teaching experience. Leaders in the Christian spiritual formation of others should consider ways to draw individuals into personal use and reflection of the Scripture, with faith becoming a faith of participation rather than observation. Encouraging leaders to use their personal copies of Scripture, whether on a handheld device or leather-bound book, should not be overlooked in the ministry design of the local congregation for spiritual formation.

For years at the former Baptist Sunday School Board, the Sunday School Division made a mantra out of the phrase, “We don’t teach the Bible to adults, youth, children, or preschoolers. We teach adults, youth, children, and preschoolers the Bible.” The point of the statement was to highlight the needs, characteristics, context, and level of learning of the learner. This concept was a product of the development of educational philosophy in Christian education as far back as Horace Bushnell in 1848. Another reason was the biblical foundations of Jesus’ ministry in taking His disciples from where they were in immaturity and moving them to where He wanted them to be. Also, this idea is underscored by Paul’s admonishment that he must begin with the milk and move Christians to more substantive Biblical teaching.

As previously mentioned, in Louis B. Hanks’s “The Biblical Dimensions of the Spiritual Life,” Bruce Powers’s “The Phases of Faith Development,” and James Fowler’s “Stages of Faith Development,” the developmental context of learning should be taken into account. Recently, there have been

challenges of stage-oriented theories. At the heart of developmental theory is the concept that all people move in order through the same stages but that the rate differs based on internal and external factors. Specifically the previously mentioned theories and others like those of Kohlberg, Erikson, and Piaget assert that individuals may not move through all the stages and may stop or regress at any time. The developmental stage, the life context, the level of learning, and interest of the learner play a role in assisting Christian spiritual formation regardless of the stage orientation.

Another context mentioned by Pazmino is essential for consideration—the context of teaching. This context for many learners is a small group setting. In terms of church, this could be described as the Sunday School class, small group Bible study, cell group, home group, or life group, and it should not be unique to the one age group. All learners need to be in community in a group small enough to grow in relationship, giftedness, and service. The small group should first and foremost lead individuals to a deeper relationship with Christ. In the small group as the body of Christ, His followers can participate in "what is truly real and really true."[237]

In the context of the small group, individual Christians begin to form and understand their own giftedness. The raw materials of giftedness start to shape during Bible studies and the forming of relationships. The process of understanding and responding to individual calls can be encouraged, supported, and directed within the small groups of all ages. Then, the natural extension of this giftedness moves from the benefit of the individual and their small group, and then to others both inside and outside of the body of Christ. In service to those outside the body of Christ, small groups should find ways to participate in the Great Commission by bringing non-Christians into relationships of both the corporate and small group expressions of the community of faith. The commitment should be to help individuals grow spiritually, leading them to know Christ as Savior or to be spiritually formed into the image of Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways can you help parents and teachers of preschoolers, children, and youth take advantage of teaching opportunities in guiding their young ones toward being spiritually formed into the image of Christ?

2. Think about your own conversion experience. What were the antecedent events and stages to your transformation? Who were the people used by God in this spiritual change? How can you assist individuals in your ministry or small group with the same life-changing experience?
3. Evaluate your teaching and use of the Bible. Are you using the Bible in a way that brings about holistic change? How are you encouraging individuals to engage Scripture?
4. Are you in a small group where you can grow in your relationship with God and others? Are you growing in giftedness and service? In what ways? How can you continue to grow?

Chapter 6



REPRODUCING DISCIPLES: OUTREACH AND EVANGELISM

Doug Powell, Ph.D.

Since the first century, evangelism has been at the heart of the church's mission and purpose. Jesus made it clear in what we call the Great Commission that believers were to be actively involved in reaching people with the gospel and making disciples.

> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18–20, NASB).

For church leaders and members alike, the problem has typically not been with levels of understanding and agreement regarding the primacy of evangelism but with the process of implementing the Great Commission mandate through the local church. How is evangelism to be done through the church? How can it be enhanced? How should it be evaluated?

Evangelism Models in Church Settings

Evangelism is often described using farming metaphors, comparing the processes of preparation, planting, watering, and harvesting to evangelistic activity. Just as there are different methods and approaches to farming and agriculture, however, there are various methods and models for planning, implementing, evaluating, and staffing evangelism efforts. From a macro perspective, one might categorize these according to the quantity of people involved. In this case, the models might be labeled mass evangelism, household *(oikos)* evangelism, and individual (that is, personal) evangelism. The church can consider each of these models as applicable and worthy of attention.

There are also various other classifications or modes of evangelism that should be considered in local church settings. In today's diverse population within the United States, churches must address the cross-cultural aspects of evangelism. There are also unique considerations related to human development through the lifespan.[238] For example, what unique approaches should be taken regarding evangelism with children? With teenagers?

Although evangelism is often classified as a separate aspect of a church's ministry, truly effective evangelistic churches introduce an element of evangelism into every ministry plan and practice. When planning and developing ministry plans, evangelism should be woven into the fabric of both individual and corporate ministry strategies. Let us turn our attention to various applications of evangelism through the local church.

Personal evangelism. In his book, *Evangelism through the Local Church,* Michael Green rightly asserts that evangelistic efforts should begin in the pulpit. If the preaching ministry of a church does not have an evangelistic tone, one can scarcely expect the remainder of the church's ministries to reflect such an emphasis. The identity of a church's pulpit message and theme gives a clear indication of a church's heart and ministry direction. Many churches allow evangelism to stop at the pulpit. In this approach, preaching is the only demonstration of a church's obedience to the Great Commission mandate.

What events has your church used as evangelistic opportunities to connect with and reach local residents? In what ways can your church make better use of event evangelism?

Green reminds us that evangelism at its heart is meant to be person to person. The New Testament is clear that every believer in Christ is to be a

witness—giving testimony of the life transformation that has been experienced through Christ and the availability of this same change for every person. For effective personal evangelism to take place, believers must be motivated to share their faith. Believers should also be given basic guidance. In addition, sufficient organization is needed to engage as many believers as possible in evangelistic efforts.[239] More will be said about effective organization and training for evangelism later in this chapter.

Mass evangelism. Residents in every developed country across the globe have probably heard of evangelist Billy Graham. Renowned for his evangelistic crusades in arenas on every continent, Dr. Graham is probably the world's most noted practitioner of mass evangelism. Whereas the *personal* evangelism model can be called "one-to-one," this model can be termed "one-to-many." A single communicator of the gospel message conveys the good news to hundreds and sometimes thousands of listeners. With the continued development of global television networks, the World Wide Web (the Internet), and other digital communication methods, one person can simultaneously connect with literally millions of people through one-way communication.

On a smaller scale, churches can also organize and conduct mass evangelism efforts, using preachers and/or vocational evangelists who are gifted in communicating the gospel message to large groups of people. The methods used for these local crusades are often modeled after those perfected by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and similar ministries.

Event evangelism. Effective personal evangelism normally involves some degree of relationship between the sender and the receiver of the message. Whereas mass evangelism has one sender and many receivers, event evangelism is a more complex approach to conveying the gospel message. In many cases, it has similar characteristics to mass evangelism, but the evangelistic nature of the event is often not as overtly stated as with an evangelistic crusade.

There are various types of event evangelism, with some reflecting more clearly their evangelistic purpose than others. In some cases, the mere location of the event (for example, a local church) implies its intended evangelistic purpose. However, with event evangelism, there is often a separate aspect of the proceedings intended to attract unredeemed persons. In these instances, the strategic approach of event planners is to appeal to

common interests of the intended audience. The gospel message is then related to the event's main theme. Examples could include the following:

Consider your own experience with mass evangelism efforts. What benefits and drawbacks associated with this model can you identify?

Holiday entertainment: This might include Christmas programs, Easter productions, Halloween alternatives, Valentine banquets, Independence Day celebrations, Veteran's Day observances, and local festivals.
Sports themes: This might include "strong men" displays, children's sports programs, and events containing the testimony of noted Christian athletes.
Regional interest events: This might include celebrations of major events in a community's history.

Servant evangelism. Servant evangelism is a model that uses the fulfillment of human needs to build bridges of relationship for sharing the gospel. In this model, the expression of love and concern for neighbors in the community gives the church a platform for answering one question: "Why?" The view of this model is to "love them until they ask you why." It involves both showing and sharing the gospel message. This model can take many forms. Among the possible options are the following:

- Basic auto mechanics for single moms or dads
- Yard work or basic handyman assistance for widows and widowers
- English as a second language classes
- Citizenship classes
- GED diploma assistance
- Career assistance courses for those in job transitions
- Tutoring services for students
- Neighborhood cleanup—various adaptations of this strategy

Two of the most noted writers on servant evangelism are Steve Sjogren and Robert Lewis.[240] These authors' ministries and books provide many examples of this type of evangelism that can be implemented by churches in various settings.

Evangelism through the Sunday School

For Baptist churches, the most comprehensive Christian education ministry in the local church has historically been the Sunday School. The ministry scope of Sunday School includes all age groupings within the church. In Southern Baptist denominational tradition, Sunday School has been referred to as the "evangelistic arm of the church." Whether this has been consistently applied at the local church level is subject to debate. However, if viewed in this way and intentionally positioned for evangelism, Sunday School can be a formidable strategy for pursuit and fulfillment of the Great Commission mandate. Hemphill and Taylor offer several elements that should be considered:

How would you describe your perspective on evangelism through the Sunday School? How is this perspective evidenced in your life and ministry?

Casting the vision. Proverbs 29:18 is often quoted as a biblical reference for the necessity of vision-casting in the work of the church. The same is true of evangelism through the Sunday School. Although the original purpose and scope of this ministry is strongly related to evangelism, Baptist churches have, over time, seen the evangelistic purpose of Sunday School reduced and diminished by other purposes, such as Bible study and fellowship. Therefore, a clear vision and commitment to evangelism must be established before this purpose can be practiced consistently in a church.

Considering reasons for evangelism through the Sunday School. If church leaders are to establish or reestablish this core value and strategic approach, it will be helpful to consider supporting reasons for such action. Again we turn to Hemphill and Taylor for support reasons and advantages to this approach.[241]

- No new ministry organization is needed. This assumes a church is already organized for ministry through Sunday School.
- The small group structure of Sunday School facilitates higher levels of individual care and reaching.
- Witnessing is identified as a clear responsibility of Sunday School leaders and members (again based on the assumption that this has been communicated and understood by leaders and members).
- Sunday School ministry functions fifty-two weeks a year, thereby providing a stable, reliable, dependable ministry platform.

- Given that Sunday School is (in many cases) the largest organization of leaders and members within a church, the potential for significant spiritual impact and reaching is greater than other ministries.
- Sunday School provides maximum use of the principles of homogeneity and receptivity. The homogeneous principle in this context refers to the relationships developed in small group Bible studies. These groupings and their relationships provide fertile ground for the seeds of the gospel to be shared. The principle of receptivity applies in the sense that the results of evangelism can be expected to be higher, due to the strong relational context provided by Sunday School.
- Due to its multigenerational organization, Sunday School allows evangelism to occur through the human lifespan.
- When implemented strategically, Sunday School provides a simple, workable plan.
- Using the principle of enrollment, Sunday School can involve lost people in Bible study, leading to likely decisions to experience eternal life through Christ.
- Rather than relying on open volunteerism to produce sufficient numbers of participants in evangelistic ministry efforts, Sunday School provides a consistent pool of people to carry on the church's evangelistic outreach.

How well does your church use Sunday School (or similar open group ministry) for evangelism in the church? What steps can be taken to more effectively use this ministry organization to pursue the Great Commission mandate?

Evangelism Challenges and Barriers

Every church setting is unique, with challenges and barriers to effective evangelism relative to the church location, membership, philosophy of ministry, staffing, and other variables. However, some common obstacles need to be addressed and overcome if evangelism is to be effectively practiced.

Cultural barriers. Paul made it clear in his writings that the gospel is for all people, regardless of race, class, gender, heritage, or any other classification (Galatians 3:28). The good news of Christ is *sufficient* for all people, giving them access to eternal life and abundant life, but *efficient* only

for those who avail themselves of the redemptive work of Christ. In the attempt to export the gospel outside the walls of the church, there are some cultural considerations that must be addressed. Among these are:

Language barriers: Do the materials being used for sharing the gospel communicate the message in the language of the people?
Literacy levels: Do the materials and approaches of sharing the gospel assume levels of literacy (reading and writing) that match the target audience?
Social bias: Do cultural biases exist (in the church and/or community) that would serve as a barrier to effective communication or witnessing?

What efforts have leaders in your church made to learn about the surrounding community, with a view to understanding the cultural identity of those you are attempting to reach?

Cultural barriers can often be overcome through education and awareness. Church leaders can spend time learning about their community and its cultural identity as a matter of course for effective ministry. This is similar to the approach taken by missionaries who take the time and effort to understand the culture(s) before going onto the mission field. Often local Baptist associations and state Baptist convention offices provide resources that can be helpful in exegeting the culture, providing detailed demographic profiles of the population base.

Internal barriers. In a well-known twist of a historic phrase, Pogo cartoon creator Walt Kelly put the following caption on an Earth Day poster in 1971: "We have met the enemy and he is us!"[242] The Apostle Paul reached a similar conclusion regarding the believer's struggle against the sin nature in Romans 5–7. Our attempts to follow God, obey His commands, and pursue His will are often compromised by our own weakness. In such situations, we are often our own enemy.

Regarding the Great Commission mandate, several internal barriers stand in the way of effective pursuit of this standard. Some of these barriers are personal, while others are best viewed from an aggregate perspective, relating to groups of believers or entire church bodies. Here are some commonly experienced internal barriers to effective evangelism:

Apathy: When the topic of personal evangelism and reaching the lost is raised in local churches, it is often met with a lack of enthusiasm. Believers are certainly excited about seeing new converts publicly profess Christ as Savior, but the appeal for more "workers in the fields" frequently falls on deaf ears.

Theological misunderstanding: Believers can be unresponsive to the call to be more active in evangelism because of the mistaken belief that everyone is going to heaven. In many cases, this universalist belief is not the result of biblical error in preaching or teaching but a failure by individuals to know and internalize the truths of Scripture as they relate to the spiritual nature of man apart from a saving relationship with God through Christ.

Abdication: This barrier is sometimes caused by confusion regarding the active role of both laity and clergy in evangelism. Scripture does not differentiate the Great Commission mandate between these two groups. All believers are to be active in sharing their faith.

Ministry clutter: An old adage states, "Activity does not equal accomplishment." Without sufficient prioritization, evangelism can be absent from a church's calendar. This condition can be lessened if a church includes an element of evangelism and outreach in all of its ministry pursuits.

Strategic omission: Churches minimize their evangelistic influence if they do not make evangelism part of the discussion when existing ministries are evaluated and when new ministries are considered and developed. This omission typically does not occur intentionally but happens in stages through "strategy drift," slowly moving away from making evangelism a regularly practiced core value of the church.

As you consider your church and its members, what internal barriers to effective evangelism can you identify?

Philosophical and theological challenges. In addition to cultural and internal/personal challenges, churches can face barriers that come in the form of differences in philosophy. This may take the form of theological variance or differences in stated and/or practiced philosophies of ministry. Among the challenges in theology are the following:

- Differing views on the biblical responsibility of believers to share their faith
- Varying perspectives regarding the degree of freedom of will by persons presented with the gospel message
- Differing views regarding the role of clergy and laity (see “Role confusion issues,” the next boldfaced section)
- The nature of the gospel: what constitutes the gospel message?

The existence of these theological barriers must be determined by each local church body and addressed as necessary to ensure fruitful and faithful obedience to the Great Commission mandate.

There may also be differences related to philosophy of ministry, which affect the way evangelism is practiced by individual churches. Several questions arise related to this challenge. What is considered evangelism? Does it include both demonstration and proclamation of the gospel? What are the measures used to evaluate evangelistic fruitfulness? Faithfulness? To what degree should the ministerial staff be involved in the church’s formal evangelistic ministries? As with other ministerial issues, these should be clearly explained and understood by all staff ministers and, where applicable, by the church at large.

Are you aware of any theological barriers existing in your church that are hindering evangelism? Are there variances in stated and/or understood philosophy of ministry that serve as barriers to effective evangelism?

Role confusion issues (role of laity and clergy). This barrier can be summarized with the question, “Whose job is evangelism?” The biblical response is “everyone’s job.” Although church members may intellectually understand that sharing one’s faith is every believer’s privilege and responsibility, there still exists the practice of letting the “hired guns” do the bulk of the evangelism in a local church. This can result for various reasons, including fear, a sense of insufficient training, or simple apathy, as noted above. Ephesians 4:11–12 is clear on the responsibility of ministerial staff to equip the members for the “work of service” (NASB). Robert Coleman’s classic, *The Master Plan of Evangelism,* provides an excellent framework for mobilizing both clergy and laity in lifestyles of outreach and evangelism:

selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction.[243]

Components Necessary for Effective Evangelism/Outreach Ministries

As noted in the previous section, evangelism is both a ministry and an emphasis. In other words, it can exist in a local church as both an identifiable, visible ministry endeavor and a systemic ingredient in every ministry the church offers. In this section, we will examine the elements necessary for evangelism to be effectively practiced through a local church. Attention will be given both to the introduction of these components in formal evangelism ministries (e.g., visitation, prospect discovery, and evangelism activities) and inclusion of these components in the ministry plan for the church at large. Given that churches and the communities they serve come in an array of sizes, careful selection is made to ensure content is applicable in multiple settings.

Sufficient and efficient organization. When the topic of evangelism ministry organization is examined, two questions come to the surface: How much organization is needed? How will the organizational framework assist in fulfillment of the Great Commission mandate? The first question deals with the sufficiency (scope) of organization, while the latter addresses the efficiency (benefits) of organizational models.

Locating prospects. To use a fishing metaphor, a fisherman's job is made much easier when he knows where the fish are located. The use of modern electronic "fish finders" has given fishermen an advantage in this effort, reducing the time and guesswork associated with knowing where to put a hook in the water. The process of being "fishers of men" (Mark 1:17; Matt. 4:19) is much more complex, though there are ways to effectively find *the fish* in our evangelism efforts. Here are some common prospecting approaches:

How is your church identifying prospects for salvation and church membership? What are some ways you could explore to broaden the scope of prospect discovery efforts?

Normal, everyday contacts: In the routines of life, traversing the traffic patterns of regular schedules, we come in contact with many people who are candidates for hearing the life-saving message of the gospel. It has been estimated that if you consider every Christian believer's circle of influence in the United States, there would not be a single U.S. resident omitted from the reach of some believer's life patterns.

Oscar Thompson popularized this idea in his classic *Concentric Circles of Concern*.[244] Even in the twenty-first century, this concept can be effectively applied. Thompson provides seven stages of using relationships in evangelism: get right with God, self, and others; survey your relationships; work with God through prayer; build relationship bridges to people; show God's love by meeting needs; make disciples and help them grow; and help new Christians make disciples. Church leaders can help their members identify the five to ten people (or more) in their immediate circle of contact. Those within the circle who are not already believers could be considered prospects for evangelism.

Who's in the house? Sometimes the most receptive prospects for evangelism are right under our noses. They are sitting in our worship services, attending our events, and perhaps participating in our Sunday School or small group gatherings. The mistaken assumption is that everyone who attends an evangelical church on a regular basis is a believer in Christ.

Prospecting services: Formal companies now exist whose business purpose is to provide contact information to churches, businesses, and other organizations desiring to locate prospects for their services. These companies vary in respect to their fees, quality and timeliness of information provided, and understanding of unique needs related to church prospecting.

Neighborhood canvassing: One of the most traditional methods for discovering prospects is door-to-door canvassing, sometimes referred to as a People Search. In this method, teams of individuals go to every household in an identified area (for example, one mile from the church facility) with the purpose of identifying persons who have no church affiliation. Often a gift or other "leaving piece" is given to thank people

for their participation and provide information about the church and its ministries. The effectiveness of this method can vary, depending on the nature of a community, the profile of the church (that is, neighborhood, community, or regional), and the local legal statutes regarding such activities.

Selecting materials. Prospect discovery is an exciting and possibility-laden process. It answers the question "Who can we reach?" without presupposing conclusions relative to individual responsiveness. Another organizational issue is the matter of materials. What literature, media, and related materials will be needed in making connections with people to be reached? Going back to the fishing analogy, the fisherman must make the decision about the type of fishing rod to use, the selection of suitable bait, what type of boat to use (if any), and the outfitting of his tackle box.

In cross-cultural outreach efforts, additional thought must be given to the use of materials in the native language(s) and literacy level(s) of persons being reached. Current population trends in the United States often require the consideration of Spanish-language materials for outreach efforts, and Christian publishers have both identified and met the need. With the plethora of Christian publishers and materials now available, it is vital that the selection of materials be carefully practiced. Attention should also be given to doctrinal and theological content and the particular church's philosophy of ministry when making selections. Among the types of materials to consider are the following:

Who is responsible for selecting evangelism materials in your church? How can this process be bolstered to address the needs of new believers and the information-providing process regarding church ministries?

Evangelistic tracts: Will printed materials be used that explain the plan of salvation in a clear, concise way? Are special tracts needed for specific age groups (for example, children, teens, and language groups)?
Follow-up materials: The Great Commission is two-fold, including both evangelism and discipleship. Our evangelistic efforts, to be effective beyond the moment, must give attention to the "next steps" for new Christian believers. Follow-up materials include both the immediate disciplines of Bible study, prayer, fellowship, baptism, and church

membership and the long-term aspects of growth toward spiritual maturity.

Ministry reminders: Are there literature pieces produced by the church that can be left with prospects, giving them information about the church and its ministries?

Calendar issues. There are 168 hours in each week, and 52 weeks in each year. Every church operates with the same time restrictions, though some deal with it more intentionally than others. The squares on a calendar can be one of the greatest battlegrounds and barriers to effective evangelism in a church. When does a church do evangelism? However, there is a paradox when discussing the calendar and evangelism.

As previously established and abundantly clear from biblical teaching, evangelism is not meant to be a placeholder in the schedule of a church or in the life of an individual believer. A review of the Greek word "go" used in Matthew 28:19 indicates the original meaning of this word could be translated "as you are going." The implication is that sharing one's faith and making disciples is not a *point in time* occurrence, but instead is meant to be a *period of time* process. Its span of time is measured in calendar pages, not minutes and seconds. In other words, believers are to be actively sharing their faith and discipling new believers as a matter of course in their daily routines. They should not limit their evangelistic efforts to formal times on a church's calendar.

Does this mean, then, that organized outreach efforts at specific, calendared times are not worthy of attention? Should we clear the calendar of all formal evangelistic efforts? Of course not. There are times when we, as good stewards, must utilize opportunities for presenting the gospel and "casting the net" as fishers of people. In addition, specific times for evangelism training must be scheduled to be effective.

The point of bringing up this issue is that if a church is not intentionally setting aside time to train and involve its members in evangelistic efforts, it can relegate the Great Commission mandate to an afterthought worthy of only occasional mention. Other ministry activities, including many that should include evangelistic elements, can crowd out intentional evangelism in and through the church.

Information processing. We live in what has been called the "Information Age." Given the availability of information, human knowledge has the potential to increase greatly in only a brief period of time. Fields

related to technology and science hold even more potential for rapid increases in human knowledge. We have grown accustomed to receiving, handling, and processing large amounts of information.

When seeking to be effective and efficient in pursuit of the Great Commission mandate, we must be good stewards of information. This begins with data we have collected regarding prospects for salvation and church membership. Computer database software and church information management software have made this process much more efficient. However, the greatest software and databases ever devised are of no use if not utilized.

Other bodies of information that must be effectively managed and processed include the following:

Maps for outreach visits: Whether it is weekly outreach/visitation or occasional large scale outreach events, a key question is, "How do we get there?"

Outreach results: To be effective in our Great Commission pursuits, we must give attention not only to the redemption of persons but also to the disciple-making process. In order to do this, we must know more about an evangelistic encounter than whether "a decision was made for Christ." Certainly, the salvation of one soul is worthy of celebration, both here and in heaven (Luke 15:7, 10). However, the work is not done, but only beginning, at the point of salvation (Colossians 1:28; Philippians 1:6). Good recordkeeping will assist us in helping the new believer take the next step because it provides us with key insights that will guide our disciple-making efforts in the future.

Progress reports regarding discipleship: Without necessary information regarding individuals who make salvation decisions, the process of effective follow-up becomes more difficult. A communication breakdown anywhere in the process can jeopardize future ministry efforts with individuals and/or families.

Strategic planning and leadership training. The critical elements of planning for outreach and evangelism and leadership training are addressed

in the chapters covering age group considerations and development of volunteer leaders.

Concluding Thoughts

The story is told of an evangelistic campaign in England, led by Dwight L. Moody. As the story goes, he was approached by two women and informed by them that his method of personal evangelism was not acceptable to them. When he asked them what method they used, they replied that they had none, at which time he responded, "Well, I prefer the method I use to the one you are not using."[245] The point of this story and the application for local church ministry is similar to the slogan for the athletic company *Nike®:* "Just do it." We must not get caught up in having the perfect method or organization, because there are no perfect models. Our influence as local church leaders must be to assist the church in its mission to reach the world for Christ and discover ways we can contribute to the effort through Christian education.

Discussion Questions

1. What value is there in relating outreach/evangelism and disciple-making to the church's five functions?
2. Of the ten small group Bible study models offered in the chapter, which three do you feel have the greatest potential for fostering true life change that is biblically transformational? Why?
3. Which of the church-based evangelism models have you seen applied most effectively in reaching people and communicating the gospel message?
4. Why is evangelism through the church's Bible study ministry important to the church's overall outreach/evangelism efforts?
5. Name and give examples (from your experience and knowledge) of the identified evangelism barriers.
6. Why are role confusion issues relevant to our discussion of church-based evangelism and outreach?
7. The author posits the view that information processing is critical to effective outreach and evangelism in church settings. Do you agree with this perspective? Why or why not?

For Further Reading

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Chapter 7



THE LOCAL CHURCH ON MISSION

Bob Garrett, Ph.D.

The local church is a body of baptized believers in Jesus Christ who worship God and serve together as the agency of God's kingdom to promote God's missionary plan on Earth.

The Church as God's Missionary People

Concern for missions education in local churches responds to deep conviction about the nature of the church and the task given by Jesus as its Founder. A recently baptized young woman stood up in her first business meeting and asked the question, "What's a church supposed to do anyway?" Sooner or later every believer connected with church must ask and answer this question. Our possible answers should revolve around two simple tasks —worship and missions. These two things are distinguishing hallmarks of a church. Worship and missions are what make church different from all other organizations. A church is not like the local PTA, a civic club such as Rotary, a country club, a bridge party, or a college fraternity or sorority. Church is different because it is the community of Jesus' followers who live by the double commandment of their Lord—first to love God with all their hearts, minds, soul, and strength, and secondly to love their neighbors as themselves.

However shocking, John Piper is correct in stating that "missions is not the purpose of the church—worship is!"[246] His surprising statement finds

support in the Westminster Confession, where “the chief end of man is to worship God and to give Him glory.” Fundamentally a church is a community oriented toward God, prioritizing worship in which we together ascribe to God the glory that He is due. Yet Piper hurries on to say: “Missions exists because worship doesn’t.” For Piper, the tragedy of our world is that so many people created by God in His own image do not yet know Him, so that they cannot worship Him. For God’s glory to be magnified among the nations, they must be able to worship God. Anything less robs God of His glory. From this angle Piper affirms that “missions is really just recruiting for the choir!” So, for Piper missions is a necessary result of worshipping God.

As theologian Emil Brunner said in this oft-quoted statement, “The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.”[247] While worship is how the church relates to God, our loving acts of service and our witness to the gospel are the ways the church relates to the rest of humanity. Worship and mission are mutually reinforcing since it is impossible to love God whom we cannot see and still hate a brother whom we can see (1 John 4:20). In fact, to truly love others is a pre-requisite to worship: Jesus teaches that if we put a sacrifice on the altar and remember that our brother has something against us, we must leave the sacrifice and first make peace with our brother (Matthew 5:24). Worship can never be true that does not send us out into the highways and byways to invite others to join us at the banquet table (Matt. 22:9). Just as faith without works is dead (James 2:20), worship without mission is a distortion of God’s purpose for His people.

When we grow close to the living God we discover that an essential aspect of his character is the *Missio Dei*, or the Mission of God.[248] God has a mission, and He is missionary at an essential level of His own character. Ever since Adam and Eve missed their appointment with the Lord God in the Garden of Eden to walk together in the cool of the day, God has taken the initiative to restore relationship. God seeks out Adam, calling, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9, NASB). A tenacious bond of love in the Creator links Him to every person created in His image (Gen. 1:26). The story line of the whole Bible is about God reaching out to rebellious humanity and inviting us back into a loving relationship with Himself. As Paul states it: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19, NASB). Henry Blackaby in *Experiencing God* tells us that since God is on mission, our task in coming closer to God is to discover what He is doing in the world and to

join Him in it. Therefore as God's people we are intended to be "on mission with God." [249]

The Church as a Great Commission People

Since 1792 when William Carey published his pamphlet, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens,*[250] Baptists have looked to the famous words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18—20 as a mandate for how to focus our energy as churches. Tellingly, Carey argued to reluctant Christian leaders of his own day asking: if Jesus' commandment to make disciples of all nations was only for the apostles and not a binding mandate on Christians today, then why do we continue from this same verse to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

In Matthew 28:18—20, Jesus returns as the living Lord raised from the dead. He first gives the Great Declaration—"All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me" (Matt. 28:18, NIV84). Then he gives the Great Commission—"Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19, NIV84). Finally Jesus makes the Great Promise—"Behold, I am going with you even to the end of the world."[251] Achieving the Commission depends on the support of the Declaration and the Promise. It is interesting to see that the Greek word *panta,* meaning "all," is used repeatedly in this brief statement: (1) there is "all authority" now invested in Jesus as risen Lord; (2) then "all nations" are the object of the disciple-making process Jesus sets in motion with his missionary commandment; (3) there are "all things I have commanded you," the content of the message that the disciples must ultimately transmit to new converts; and (4) there are "all the days" (also translated as "every single day") that Jesus promises to walk alongside his disciples as they share the gospel with all peoples.

The main verb of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18—20 is the imperative to "make disciples." There are three modal participles in Greek that describe how the task of making disciples is to be accomplished in sequence. First, at the beginning of it all is the mandate to "Go!" The unconverted are not expected to come to church in Jesus' mandate, but His disciples are commanded to go and to help people to engage gospel truth on their own turf and in their own cultural environment. Secondly, "baptizing" functions as an umbrella term to describe all the evangelistic efforts that are

involved in helping a person come to faith in Jesus and sealing that with radical personal identification with the gospel.[252] Thirdly, “teaching” describes the patient task of modeling how Christians live and explaining to new believers how they can live out fully or cling to all that Jesus originally taught. These three phases or steps are each essential to making new disciples.

The conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel is not the only missionary commandment on the lips of Jesus. Every one of the resurrection appearances of Jesus includes some expression of the missionary mandate, so that one can speak of several Great Commissions, including these: Luke 24:36—49; John 20:19—23; Acts 1:6—8 as well as Matthew 28:16-20.[253] James Stewart reminds us that in no way does the biblical mandate rest with the words in Matthew 28, suggesting even that if by some happenstance of history the ending of that Gospel had been torn away and lost to us, we would still be committed to missions, since God’s loving concern for all peoples is clearly stated all the way through the Scriptures.[254]

All the World in All the Word[255]

The first missions professor in North America, W. O. Carver, advocated the case for global missions by demonstrating that wherever you turn in the Bible, its message is missionary. Using careful exegesis in *Missions in the Plan of the Ages,* Carver finds key missionary texts from every book of the Bible.[256] The title comes from his exposition of Ephesians 3, which he takes to be central for understanding missions. Carver finds the key to Paul’s theology in Paul’s new understanding of “mystery” and of an “administration” established before the foundation of the world. The term “administration” also refers to a design or overarching plan that God had determined from the outset of creation. God’s choice of the Jewish people makes them His instrument to share His love with all the rest of humanity. In this eternal plan, God’s election of the Jewish people does not grant them a privileged status. Rather, by calling Israel to salvation and blessing them, God shows in them how all the nations can become “fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6, NASB). Being a part of the people of God means also being on mission to share the good news with others. A generation of students left Dr. Carver’s classes certain that God’s firm

intention was not just to save us in Jesus but also to make us into His instruments to share that salvation with every other living human being.

More recently scholars emphasize the missionary dimension of Christian faith as central to understanding the Bible. David Bosch in *Transforming Mission*[257] contends that mission is more than one activity of Christians or merely one dimension of practical theology. Against the habit in seminaries of arguing that missionary efforts are derived from our theology, Bosch inverts the order of significance by demonstrating that the New Testament was born in a missionary context. Its twenty-seven books clearly comprise a collection of missionary documents—written by missionaries for newly planted churches with the goal of advancing their missionary cause. By emphasizing the apostolic mission of the early church as the formative influence on the content of the New Testament, Bosch can actually assert that "Missions is the mother of theology."

Kostenberger and O'Brien claim that mission is rightfully the central theme of all biblical theology.[258] Walter Kaiser has also maintained that mission is central to the theology of the Old Testament.[259] In fact, the entire Book of Jonah may be best interpreted as a missionary tract.[260] In the New Testament, Joachim Jeremias demonstrates that Jesus of Nazareth envisioned a global ministry to all nations for his followers.[261] It is this vision for a universal mission from Jesus that Paul implements in his worldwide missionary efforts.[262] The whole Bible is about *Announcing the Kingdom*.[263] Dean Flemming finds embedded into the very text of the New Testament multiple examples where early Christians faced the challenge of adapting their Jewish heritage to the customs and understandings of the wider Greco-Roman world.[264]

From the fact that cultural adjustments and contextualizing the message were part of Christianity from its beginnings, church leaders today can understand that many of the vexing issues in church life result from living in a dynamic society where the community around the church is constantly in transition. Both to survive and to be faithful to our legacy from early Christians, the church must learn how to reinvent its ministry so that it engages the contemporary culture around it.

A Traditional View of Missions Education

For decades churches have incorporated a strong emphasis on missions education in the local church. Teaching in the church about our missions responsibility responds to a deeply cherished belief that as an integral part of who we are and what we do as Christians, we are committed to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with all people everywhere in the whole wide world. Missions education understands that beyond our evangelistic efforts to share Christ with everyone in our own communities, there are still whole communities in our world deprived of all witness to the gospel, where people can never know that Jesus saves unless some of us can go and tell them.

Missions education has played a key role in keeping churches faithful to the Great Commission, combating the temptation to let the needs of the broader world get out of sight, and so out of mind. Missions education provided the foundation on which all the missionary endeavors of the denomination rested. Missions education planted the seeds in children to understand that as they grew up they might just be called as missionaries or else to support them. It forged the consensus among members in the churches that they would continue to give sacrificially to send out missionaries and that they would support them in prayer. Missions education also has reminded local churches of important issues that transcend local congregations and that can bind churches together in common cause. Baptist historians credit this missionary impulse with providing the glue that has kept Baptist churches cooperating together to reach a lost world.[265]

Take Your Hats off to the Women!

Most of the energy and leadership for missions education traditionally has come from women in the church.[266] Pastors and ministry staff play a key role in setting the tone for each local church, but if ever there was a grassroots movement of the people and by the people in Baptist life, missions education qualifies as a prime example.

While pastors did preach about missions from the pulpits, especially when missionary offerings were promoted, largely it was the women who tirelessly promoted missions education as a cornerstone of church life. They organized themselves into entities like the Women's Missionary Union that met weekly to discuss needs of lost populations at the ends of the earth and how to support missionaries sent out by the denomination. The women gathered children of the church into missions organizations. Grade school girls attended GAs, or Girls' Auxiliary.

> There was RAs, Royal Ambassadors, for the grade school boys. These children learned Scripture, they learned about missionaries and the cultures where they worked, and they learned character building from examples of missionaries and from Scripture. Younger children joined the Sunbeam Band where they learned to sing "Jesus wants me for a sunbeam to shine for him each day." After leading missions programs for their children, the women managed missions projects to help the needy in their communities and sent out "care packages" to their missionaries overseas. Most often the women set the goals for the missions offerings and were the prime movers in collecting the funds.

Going Missional: The Quest to Repurpose the Local Church

For all the good that this traditional paradigm has done, a chorus of voices notes shortcomings. The denomination considered churches as missions-minded to the extent they supported the missionary endeavors of the denomination. In fact, the way to determine which church was more "missions-minded" was to compare the percentage of the church budget sent to the denomination for missionary causes. This perspective ignored that not everything that the denomination did had a direct missionary purpose. More importantly, it created the unconscious assumption that since local churches could not do missions for themselves, they needed a denomination to manage missions by proxy. Some have questioned whether "outsourcing" missions was actually healthy for either the denomination or the local church. They have asked whether "the way we do missions" is required by the Bible or effective in today's world. So, they suggest a paradigm shift in how to implement the Great Commission in our own time.

Being missional defines church not by its internal life centered in worship, fellowship, and teaching but in its external engagement with the world around it. This stands conventional thinking on its head. Missions historians have discerned that across the generations "ecclesiology determines missiology" since missionaries generally try to replicate the church as they have known it among the peoples to whom they go.[267] However, Alan Hirsch voices the perspective of the missional church movement when he espouses that "missiology determines ecclesiology."[268] He believes that the evangelistic imperative in the community and the needs of people around us should always dictate the way we shape the church. In

other words, church is not so much for the people who attend it as for those outside it who need to hear its witness to the gospel, and the structures and programs that define church life must be adjusted accordingly.[269]

Milfred Minatrea's *Shaped by God's Heart*[270] describes initial efforts by churches to become missional. A new Christian Leadership Network provided connections for churches experimenting with "taking back" the Great Commission for their churches. Minatrea finds radical changes in churches who wanted to reconceive their identity as essentially missionary in purpose.

Bob Roberts has worked to restructure every aspect of church life—largely driven by the question: "What if the church is the missionary?" If one shifts from thinking about churches sending missionaries to thinking more about the church becoming the missionary itself, some profound changes occur. Roberts's first book, *Transformation*,[271] is a guide for members in this new kind of church to discover how to implement missional living into the basic structures of daily life as Christians. His second book, *Glocalization*,[272] speaks of how Christians can engage the world around us on mission. As such these books provide a missional approach to the local church on mission.

Reggie McNeal describes how new realities of life today challenge the cherished assumptions of evangelical life. He isolates areas where churches must consider radical change in method to carry out their mission in this new environment.[273] McNeal later suggests that in order to effect profound change in church life a "new metrics" is necessary. Church members and church leaders need a new scorecard with which to measure "success" in doing missional church engaging in the world.[274] In order to transition into this new missional model, the focal points to be measured today are in the areas of: (1) shifting from an internal focus on measuring the church itself to an external focus that measures its influence beyond its doors; (2) changing the core activity from running programs and ministries to developing people; and (3) moving from church-based leadership to community-engaged leadership.

Becoming Missionary in Our Own Community

To paraphrase the wisdom of Forrest Gump, "missionary is as missionary does." Many local churches live in a cultural bubble, and the

internal culture of the church is fundamentally out of sync with the realities of life in the immediate neighborhood. Churches use in-group vocabulary that is not shared with those who do not attend church. An unintended consequence is that unfortunately many Christians cannot talk about loving God and their relationship with Jesus as Lord using language that is comprehensible to nonchurchgoers. The assumption that church members live in a homogenous community that understands them and their faith commitments is simply no longer true. For local churches to survive, members will have to tear some pages out of the missionary manuals and learn how to talk to people about loving God, learn how to be a friend to those who are lost, and learn how to pray fervently for them to hear the good news and understand. We must learn to listen in order to discover the deepest needs of the unchurched so that we can speak about how God helps us in ways that actually touch those felt needs.

Major Challenges for Today

Clearly in our day we are obligated to ask again how best to fulfill the Great Commission from our own church. However, it is not clear where all the trend lines are pointing. What should we keep from the more traditional missions-minded approach of earlier generations? What must be implemented from the new thinking of missional churches? Here is a brief list of issues certain to be a part of what local churches must learn in order to do missions today.

Engaging immigrants in our community. More human beings have migrated from one country to another in the last generation than in all of history before. Many come to the United States. Immigrant populations from remote parts of the world have established themselves in every major city in the United States and in many small towns. Many immigrants are from places where missionaries cannot go and preach. Recently displaced persons adjusting to a new culture are more open to new ideas, values, and faith assumptions than at any other time in their lives. Immigrants are a potential harvest field for our local churches to harvest. Once converted, they may become the best evangelists to their home countries.[275] Most growth in evangelical churches in the last two decades is from work among

immigrants. For example, in Dallas, Texas, alone, Baptist churches worship in eighty-four different languages each Sunday.

Doing short-term missions. Globalization and international travel make it possible to go personally on short-term assignments where before the trip alone would have been too lengthy, too expensive, and too dangerous. Now we see a new hands-on approach for church members who want to taste missions for themselves. Robert Wuthnow documents the incredible number of people participating in short-term missions and the astonishing amount of good they achieve around the world.[276] Missionaries are grateful for the help they get.[277] However, unprepared teams can leave a poor witness where they visit. For new converts to be integrated into new churches, there must be trusted Christian leaders on the ground with a long-term commitment to a cohesive strategy. To avoid sending out "vacationaries" instead of short-term missionaries, churches must do careful orientation pre-trip and debriefing post-trip to help trip participants learn to integrate their new experiences into their lifestyles back home.

Cell groups and planting churches. Small groups provide a space where seekers can discover what Christians believe and how Christian faith functions in one's personal life. Multiplying small groups that are open to visitors opens a significant number of opportunities for non-Christians to come into meaningful relationships and dialogue with Christians about faith issues.[278] Every church begins as a small group meeting. In fact, small groups can achieve many, if not all, of the functions of a church without cumbersome institutional structures, budgets, and buildings.[279]

Planting new churches has long been recognized as the single strategy that will most quickly bring new people to Christ.[280] New churches and small churches always bring in a higher proportion of new Christians to the number of current members. New churches can be planted in strategic locations or among a strategic population in order to influence unreached people groups. In fact, the most popular and effective strategy for missionaries to use today in engaging new population segments is to seek to kick-start a church planting movement, where rapidly reproducing simple cell groups can multiply and win countless people for Christ.[281]

Engaging cities with an urban strategy. In 2010 the world passed quietly by a major landmark: for the first time in history there are more people living in cities than in rural settings. This will expand until 2050 when demographic trends predict that 76% of Earth-dwellers will reside in a

city. Therefore, to go where the people are will require increasingly that churches will be located in cities. The growing cities of the world represent a potential harvest field in the coming decades.[282]

Business as mission. A growing new breed of active Christians on mission are appearing in the business world. These kingdom professionals have learned to excel in their fields. Now they want significance by serving God in international settings. Often they need only to learn how to market their professional services globally and to discover how their network of business contacts is a ready-made circle of influence where they can share their Christian testimony as they work.[283] These kingdom professionals propose a "triple bottom line" where the first criteria is still whether it makes money, the second criteria is whether conducting business enriches human life and makes the world a better place, and the third criteria is whether by doing this business God's kingdom can come and His will can be done on earth.

A Commitment to the Unfinished Task

At the time of writing, the world population clock just rushed past the 7 billion mark. Our best research tells us that still more than 20% of the world's population live in "unreached people groups." These people groups are ethno-linguistic peoples with common language, customs, worldview, and kinship structures. What makes them "unreached" is that as yet there is no gospel witness among them. They have no access to the Bible, since none exists in their language. There is no church among them. They have little or no Christian literature or radio/TV broadcasts. A person in these large groups can be born, grow up, get married, have children, grow old, and die —and never once hear that Jesus saves![284] Together the population of unreached groups is about 2.5 billion. For that indecently large number of people to hear the gospel, it will require that local churches and individual Christians find new ways to be on mission with God in the coming days and years.

Discussion Questions

1. How can the terms "worship" and "missions" help to answer the question: "What's a church supposed to do?"

2. What do the last words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18—20 tell us about His expectations for the focus of His disciples' efforts from that time forward?
3. Would you agree or disagree that the Bible is a missionary book, written by missionaries for missionaries about their missionary efforts?
4. How has missions education contributed to the strength of denominations and the efforts of churches to connect and to cooperate?
5. What part have women played in promoting and supporting missions education and endeavors in local churches?
6. What challenges must be faced for missions to be effective in the twenty-first century?
7. How can one define an unreached people group? What role do unreached people groups play in determining the unfinished task of missions achieving world evangelization?

Chapter 8



MISSIONS EDUCATION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Sandy Wisdom-Martin, MSW

I have attended countless missionary appointment services. Missionaries are given seconds to introduce themselves, tell where they are going and the work they will be doing, and share whatever else they can squeeze into the allotted time. Without fail, some missionary appointee uses his or her precious time to explain how they felt God's call on their life through Royal Ambassadors, Girls in Action® (Southern Baptist missions programs for children), or a missions camp experience. Missions education is critical in Christian discipleship. Everyone in the church needs to experience God's heart for the nations. They need to participate in making Christ known in the world. They need to be able to hear, understand, and respond to God's missional call on their lives. The question is this: How can you practically apply the biblical mandates of Matthew 28:19—20 and Acts 1:8 in a local church setting? This section will provide foundation.

Beyond Program to Passion

Missions is one of the key programs of the church. Along with Bible study, worship, and discipleship, effective missions education is elemental to the health of your congregation. A true passion for missions, not a special formula, will ignite your congregation. This is the kind of passion that grew in the heart of a member of Girls' Auxiliary (now called Girls in Action), Martha Myers. Even at a young age, she was aware of God's call to

missions. Martha once said, “My friend Linda Ott and I planned to quit school as soon as the law allowed and go to China. Meanwhile the class bullies were our evangelistic targets.”[285] At the age of twelve, she realized medicine could be the means by which she could share God’s love.

During a break in medical school, she served as a short-term missions worker in Yemen. Martha was captivated by the Yemeni people and determined in her heart this is where God called her.[286] What about a prestigious medical career in the United States? What about leaving family and friends behind? What about the dangers of working in a Muslim country? Nothing mattered except total surrender to the will of God. Martha participated in a program of the church, but it became the passion that drove her life. This passion kept her in Yemen despite being carjacked and held captive by Muslim militants. When they threatened to kill her, she responded, “Well, I’ll be in heaven.”[287]

During her decades of missionary service, Martha saved thousands of lives. In the end, she lost her own life when an assailant entered the medical clinic and shot three missionary personnel. Long before, she requested to be buried in Yemen if she died there. Yemeni friends built a casket and laid her to rest on the hospital grounds in Jibla the day after she died. Her father said, “Over here [in the United States], it would just be another grave. There it’s a testimony.”[288] A passion developed as a member of Girls’ Auxiliary fired her lifelong missionary zeal.

Missions Advocates

Many times church staff members wait to see what emerges from grassroots missions movements within the congregation. While we encourage and applaud the efforts of lay leadership, staff members need to take active roles in becoming missions advocates and leading the way in helping the church fulfill its missions responsibility. A missions advocate nurtures a passion for outreach and missions. He or she is aware of local, regional, state, national, and international missions enterprises. An advocate fully understands how the church is supporting missionary efforts and promotes sacrificial giving. An advocate knows how to engage members of the congregation in missions education. Effective missions advocates multiply themselves by enlisting and training key leaders. Of course, missions endeavors should have pastoral support.

Best Practice

Chuck, pastor of a tiny congregation, is a tireless missions advocate. Missions sermons are frequent. Every Wednesday night he personally leads the congregation to pray for missionaries around the world. He sits on the floor with preschoolers and children as they hear stories in their missions groups. Chuck led the church to adopt an unreached people group. He is active in chaplaincy ministries locally and disaster relief nationally. It's been said of Chuck, "His words match his actions. He tenderly cares for people in need and challenges church members to do the same." Chuck leads by example. He is a true missions advocate.

The Benefits of Missions Education

Missions education is the process of equipping Christians to participate in the mission of God, locally and globally, through awareness, personal involvement, and representative missions. Missions education encourages congregants to develop a biblical worldview with a global perspective. It challenges congregants to learn and apply the Bible to their lives. Missions education demonstrates through stories from the mission field that God is at work in the world. It exposes congregants to the power of prayer as they are taught to pray for needs around them, missionaries and people groups. Missions education provides opportunities for Christians to be personally involved in missions. Their lives are changed as they see the impact of ministering to others. It helps people realize the importance of giving financially as they learn about the impact their giving makes. It encourages spiritual growth as congregants develop toward a missions lifestyle.

Model a Holistic Approach

There is a current movement afoot that values missions involvement over other missions expressions. Many churches have dismissed regular missions meetings in favor of annual missions trips. Each time I go on a missions trip, God touches my heart and renews my zeal for missions. Yet I understand missions involvement is only one component of missions education. True missions education must include learning about missions, praying for missions, supporting missions, doing missions, and leading people to faith in Christ. If you only lead your church to do missions, you are missing the

mark. How will church members be able to understand and articulate the biblical basis for missions? How will Christians know the scope of what God is doing in the world through missionary efforts? How can church members be committed to give to missions when they are not educated about funding mechanisms? Most importantly, how will Christians influence the work of God in our world without praying? Avoid the temptation to do what is expedient or popular for the moment. Approach your work with excellence, insisting on a balanced approach to missions education.

Best Practice

Robby Barrett is minister of education at Amarillo First Baptist Church. Robby says, “Missions education is foundational to the overall ministry of our church. Through missions education, First Baptist people of all ages learn to pray, study, give, serve, and go! Missions education has allowed First Baptist Church to reach out to people groups from all over the globe, right here in Amarillo. Missions education encourages and equips our people to share their faith. Because of a strong missions education ministry, our church hallways are now a rainbow of many faces sharing one faith.”

Missions for Everyone

Your missions program should provide awareness and participation opportunities to help a church involve all of its members and regular attendees, preschoolers through adults, in the mission of God. Check with your denomination to find ongoing missions organizations for gender specific and/or coed audiences. To keep everyone interested, it is essential to use age-appropriate materials. An eleven-year-old processes things much differently than a fifteen-year-old. Each child or youth needs attention given at their level. Using gender-specific teaching methods helps everyone learn more effectively. Yet, often, it simply is not possible to find enough teachers for gender-specific organization. In such instances, coed materials are available. A list at the end of this chapter details where to find Baptist missions resources.

Church and Community Ministry

One aspect of your comprehensive missions program is to move believers beyond the walls of the church to meet needs and share Christ. Church and community ministries are those actions and events conducted by local churches to meet specific needs, evangelize, and disciple people in the Christian faith. Ministry in the community can include literacy, tutoring, daycare, after-school programs, Bible clubs, transportation, support groups, mentoring programs, crisis intervention, Bible studies, recreation activities, health care, and week-day ministries. Consider these principles:

Be holistic and distinctly Christian. A Christian approach to ministry demands concern for the total person. Efforts should be made to meet all human needs (mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual). A church's ministry should not merely be a humanitarian project. The motivation is the love of God in Christ. The goal is to bring people to wholeness through Christ.

Develop network relationships. Work with others in dealing with problems in the community. You do not have to agree with people in the community on every issue. If you can find common ground, work from there. Do not start a ministry already being done in the community. There is more than enough work to go around.

Treat people as Jesus would. Make sure the ministry treats each person with respect and dignity. Give an opportunity for those receiving ministry to minister to others. Help people help themselves.

Prioritize. Undertake only what can be done well. It is better to do a few things well than many poorly. Since you will face more need than can possibly be met, determining priorities is very important.

Realize people are more important than programs. Focus on people more than program design. Find leaders with a passion for a particular ministry. If people are not interested in doing the ministry, it does not matter how wonderfully the program is designed.

Prepare for difficulties. Every outreach ministry faces difficulties. Don't let challenges defeat you.

Be flexible and innovative. No plan should be considered fixed and unchangeable.

Ministry Process Model

- Sensitize church members to human needs (sermons, Bible study, small group experiences).

- Conduct a community needs assessment.
- Study resources (people, organizations, finances, and facilities).
- Establish priorities.
- Enlist leadership.
- Develop action plans.
- Keep the church informed.

Make Connections

Contact with missionaries makes the concept of giving and praying for missions more exciting and relevant. Seek opportunities to connect with missionaries and their families. Missionaries need churches that love them and pray for them. First, identify a missionary or missionary family. The sending agency of your denomination can help. Initiate contact. Communicate carefully with personnel serving in high-security locations. Again, look to your sending agency for assistance. Commit to pray for the missionary and his or her people group. Discover ways you can support the family. As you develop deeper relationships, become involved with the work of the missionary. Begin sending teams to engage their people group. As God directs, commit to another missionary family. Do this with care. Do not diminish existing relationships. Yet keep in mind, different places in the world will appeal to different congregants. Celebrate what God is doing through each partnership.

New Paradigms for Supporting Missions

Research and be prepared to articulate the missions funding mechanisms of your church and denomination. Understand we live in a reality different from your parents and grandparents. We face many challenges. We live in an era in which many churches are simply on a plateau or are in decline. Your grandparents had loyalty to a particular denomination. That often is no longer the case. Many of our congregants worship at the altar of materialism and fail to honor biblical mandates of giving. Overall, low priority is given to world evangelism. Congregants insist on personally seeing the impact of their financial gifts. Churches are obsessed with their own facilities and programs. These challenges and more can negatively impact missions giving. That’s why it is important to adopt a holistic missions strategy. When

people are aware and involved, they will respond with gifts of financial resources.

Best Practice

I asked a missionary what I could bring from the United States to Ghana. The response was “Dr. Pepper.” I nearly caused a riot in the mission when I unpacked four cases and started distributing cans. It’s always good to have a little taste of home. Whenever you are traveling abroad, be sure to offer to transport treasures from the homeland. The requests will typically be for things like candy, peanut butter, Bibles, and other books. It brings great joy to the recipient as well as the giver. Remind the missionary how much they are loved—and nothing says “I love you” like carrying homemade cookies 2,000 miles.

Another trend to consider is unified missions giving. Rather than taking several individual missions offerings during the year, the church promotes one offering and divides it several ways. This can appeal to both staff and congregants who grow weary of multiple missions requests. There is a downside. Often individual missions causes receive less money with this approach. In addition, it is difficult to adequately promote each missions endeavor in a short period of time. People can lose connection with worthy causes. Many times, prayer support is coupled with financial appeal during times of missions promotion. When the church opts for a unified offering, often prayer support suffers. Exercise caution and consider the impact before rushing to what seems an easy answer to the financial challenges faced by your congregation.

Best Practice

Dewayne’s church gives 11.5% of their undesignated receipts to missions. In addition, they take four special offerings during the year. The church gave $42,000 to a global missions offering; nearly $19,000 to an offering for missions in North America; $18,500 to a world hunger offering; $8,600 for missions in his state; and $14,000 for a local ministry project. You might think Dewayne pastors a mega-church. No, the church has about three hundred members. Why do they give so generously? Because missions education is infused into every element of church life. Dewayne says, “Missions is the life blood of any local

church. People will bleed for what they believe is important, and what is more important than the souls of people? We need to show people that we care for them whether here or around the world. Opportunities for ministry are the perfect way for the body of Christ to be Jesus to them in a way they can understand."

A Call to Missions

Although missions is for everyone, not everyone is called to be a missionary. Yet, when you nurture a missions environment, someone will respond to God's prompting for missionary service. M. David Sills says, "The requirement of a missionary call is one of the more controversial elements of the appointment process since there is no 'chapter and verse' in the Bible that defines and demands it. However, agencies like the International Mission Board (a Baptist missions sending agency) have found through experience with thousands of missionaries that the requirement of a missional call is one of the keys to missionaries staying on the field when times get tough."[289] Missionary candidates are expected to articulate their missionary call. Cobbs wrote, "Four elements of a call were identified: (1) God's call to salvation; (2) God's call to awareness of gifts and talents; (3) God's call as an inward compulsion; and (4) God's call which involves other Christians—one's pastor, fellow Christians, church and mission board."[290]

What do you do when someone in your congregation feels called to missions? Of course, you will want to affirm God's direction in the person's life. The person will also be looking to you for direction. When a child feels called, speak in language a child can understand. Here are some things to suggest:

- Read and study the Bible.
- Do your best in school.
- Learn all you can about missions.
- Take care of your body by eating, sleeping, and exercising properly.
- Talk to God each day. Thank Him that you know about Jesus. Pray for missionaries. Ask God what He wants you to do with your life.
- Give a regular offering to your church and to special mission offerings.
- Talk to missionaries when you have opportunity.

- Help people in your community who need you, and tell them about Jesus.
- Attend church regularly.
- Talk to your parents about your interest in being a missionary.
- Join a missions group for children.

Best Practice

"I was a teenager when I knew God's call was specific to missions. My mother has always been my biggest prayer supporter. She always encouraged me to live for the Lord. Teachers, friends, pastors, and other church staff prayed for me, affirmed God's call in my life, and gave me leadership responsibilities that helped me serve Christ and grow in Him. I'll always be grateful for a Girls' Auxiliary (now Girls in Action) leader who taught me about having a daily, personal time alone with God. I thank God for the prayers and godly examples of parents, grandparents, teachers, pastors, and friends. I believe that is what's most needed by someone who feels called to missions: prayer and a Christ-like example from those who care about you."—Debbie Moore, international missionary assignments in Africa and the Middle East

As a missions advocate, you will want to research and understand the sending agencies of your denomination. Each agency will have its own process, but here are some suggestions you can make to youth and adults who feel called (in addition to the ones you make to children):

- Write the story of your life and what you believe as a Christian.
- Select a vocation and choose a college (youth).
- Research mission sending agencies.
- Understand the missionary categories and funding options available. (For example, does the agency provide financial support or must you raise your own?)
- Make initial contact with a sending agency.
- Participate in a conference or seminar about being a missionary through their agency.
- Complete an application.
- Get required training. (Most sending agencies require a college degree and study at an approved seminary.)

- Participate in an interview and appointment process.
- Complete specialized training for new missionaries.
- Secure financial and prayer support.
- Travel to your assigned area and begin work.

Twenty-Five Easy Missions Ideas for Your Congregation

1. Preach missions from the pulpit on a regular basis.
2. Begin age-level missions organizations.
3. Sponsor churchwide missions involvement projects in the community.
4. Enlist missions speakers once a quarter.
5. Have a missionary speak by teleconference during a worship service.
6. Become strategic prayer partners with missionaries around the world.
7. Offer to buy clothes for children of missionary families when they are stateside.
8. Write weekly missions prayergrams.
9. Prepare missions bulletin boards and bulletin inserts.
10. Let someone give brief missions testimonies during worship services.
11. Show missions video clips in small groups as well as during worship services.
12. Conduct an annual Missions Festival or Missions Fair at your church.
13. Sponsor a dinner built around a specific missions theme.
14. Write encouraging notes to missionaries and their families.
15. Facilitate missions trips in all your Acts 1:8 mission fields (local, state, national, international).
16. Hold clothing or food drives for local shelters.
17. Create a unique unreached peoples display for your church.
18. Encourage congregants to subscribe to missions magazines and/or resources.
19. Include short missions skits and dramas in your services.
20. Host a block party or concert as an outreach event.
21. Sponsor a “Make a Difference” day in your community.

22. Calendar a men's prayer breakfast or a women's tea to showcase missions.
23. Conduct an international banquet.
24. Prayerwalk every street in your community.
25. Enlist children to occasionally present children's sermons with a missions topic.

Discussion Questions

1. Is missions integrated into the life and ministry or your church?
2. How is your church challenging people to be on mission?
3. Develop an action plan to enhance the missions focus of your church:
   a. Select ten actions you can take to promote missions.
   b. List where to find resources to carry out those actions.
   c. Develop a timeline for your missions plan.

Missions Education Resources

Acteens®: Designed with the needs and interests of teenage girls in mind, Acteens is a missions organization for girls aged twelve to seventeen or in grades seven through twelve. Visit www.acteens.com.

Acts 1:8 Challenge: This resource provides an opportunity for churches to declare their commitment to a comprehensive missions strategy in their community, state, continent, and world. Register for the challenge at www.actsone8.com. Acts 1:8 videos are accessible at www.OneMission.TV

Adults on Mission: This missions organization is for both men and women over the age of eighteen. Monthly updates to the website include the latest news on missionaries, missions work, and new projects among unreached peoples. Visit www.adultsonmission.com.

Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®: The offering supports missionary efforts in North America. Each year, Baptists honor the life and work of Annie Walker Armstrong (1850—1938) when they give to the annual offering for North American missions named after her. A planning guide sent to each church offers information, planning tips, and a DVD-ROM. For additional promotion ideas, visit www.anniearmstrong.com. Offering envelopes, prayer guides, and posters are free and available at each state WMU Office.

Appalachian Regional Ministry: This ministry is a partnership of the North American Mission Board, Woman's Missionary Union, and thirteen Baptist state conventions within the Appalachian Region. Volunteers meet needs and share Christ. For a list of projects, visit www.arministry.org.

Biographies: If you are unable to locate missionary biographies or mission stories for children either in your library or online, Woman's Missionary Union has several books for leaders to download for free. Visit www.childrensmissions.com. You can also purchase missionary biographies at www.wmustore.com.

BGR to Go and BGR to Go Kids: Baptist Global Response is a Baptist relief and development organization. Each week, an online newsletter is produced for adults and children. For more information or to print copies of the newsletter, go to www.gobgr.org.

Bread Banks: Christians are encouraged to raise money for world hunger relief with the help of bread banks. These are available in quantities of fifty and are sold at www.wmustore.com. In Texas, consider giving your offering through the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger through the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Beyond Texas, consider the Southern Baptist World Hunger Fund.

Challengers: This missions accountability group is for boys in grades seven to twelve. Visit www.challengerscentral.com.

Children in Action*SM*: This is a comprehensive missions education organization for boys and girls in grades one through six. Visit www.childrensmissions.com.

Cooperative Program: This is an ongoing Baptist missions funding mechanism support. Each church decides how much of its undesignated gifts will be used in reaching people in its state and around the world. Visit www.cooperativeprogram.org.

Daily Missionary Birthdays: Pray for Baptist missionaries on their birthdays. Sign up to receive an e-mail each day at www.imb.org.

Disaster Relief: Volunteers feel the call of God to minister in disaster situations. Disaster relief volunteers stand ready at a moment's notice to help the hurting and bring hope during a crisis. Visit www.namb.net.

Girls in Action®: This is for girls in grades one through six and provides comprehensive missions education program with weekly lessons and projects. Visit www.gapassport.com.

International Mission Board: This is the missions sending entity of the Southern Baptist Convention with nearly 5,000 field personnel under appointment overseas around the globe. Visit www.imb.org.

Kids on Mission Pray!: Teach children about missionary kids (MKs) and how to pray for missionary families. Visit www.kidsonmission.org to sign up for the electronic newsletter.

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering®: Each year, Baptists honor the life and work of Lottie Moon when they give to the annual worldwide offering named for her. A Lottie Moon Christmas Offering Media Kit is automatically sent to each church. For additional promotion ideas, visit www.imb.org. Offering envelopes, prayer guides, and posters are free and available at each state WMU office.

Missionary Encourager: As a church, adopt a North American Mission Board missionary. Your church can provide prayer support, notes of encouragement, and care packages. For more information, go to www.namb.net/encourager or e-mail missionaryencourager@namb.net.

Missionary Moments: Find short missionary stories that can be shared during weekly worship services. Visit www.cooperativeprogram.org.

Mission Friends®: For preschoolers (ages birth through kindergarten), this is the church missions organization providing weekly lessons and projects. The primary objective of Mission Friends is to provide a strong missions foundation for preschoolers. Visit www.missionfriends.com.

MissionsFEST℠ and FamilyFEST℠: These prepackaged missions experiences (the agency makes the logistical arrangements) provide volunteers an opportunity to partner with Christians from around the country, using their individual gifts and abilities to reach out and minister to others in Christ's name. Visit www.wmu.com.

Missions Leader®: This is a quarterly planning tool for all missions leaders in the church. Subscriptions are available by calling (800) 968–7301.

Mississippi River Ministry: This is a partnership of eight Baptist state conventions to address the needs of the people in the Mississippi River region through the coordination of volunteer mission projects. The partnership networks with the North American Mission Board and Woman's Missionary Union to resource and respond to missions needs. Visit www.riverministry.com.

MyMISSION: This web-based approach helps younger women fulfill their mission as followers of Christ. Monthly updates include Bible studies,

prayer resources, mission stories, social justice articles, media reviews, and relationships. Visit www.mymissionfulfilled.com.

North American Mission Board: This group exists to work with churches, associations, and state conventions in mobilizing Baptists as a missional force to impact North America with the gospel of Jesus Christ through evangelism and church planting. Visit www.namb.net.

Prayer Initiatives: Messages from the International Mission Board's twenty-four-hour PrayerLine (800-395-PRAY) can be sent directly to your e-mail. To receive prayer requests and learn about other prayer initiatives, register at www.imb.org.

***Pure Water, Pure* Love℠:** This organization provides missionaries overseas with a water purifier that will remove disease-causing microorganisms. Individuals, churches, Sunday Schools, and missions groups can give money to purchase a water purifier that will provide enough drinking water for four years. Visit www.wmu.com.

Royal Ambassadors: For boys in grades one through six, RAs is a Bible-centered, church-based missions education organization providing weekly lessons and projects. Visit www.royalambassadors.org.

Short Term Missions: The Bridge is an online project-volunteer management system where hundreds of short-term mission projects in North America are posted. To register, visit www.thebridge.namb.net. For a listing of international projects available all over the globe, visit www.imb.org.

Teamwork Works! CP Children's Resource: Teamwork Works! can be used as a stand-alone missions study during the summer or as a missions supplement for churches that do not use traditional missions materials with their children. Seven sessions highlight the ministries of state and Baptist entities. Download free from www.cooperativeprogram.org.

Volunteer Mobilization Project Logistics Manual: The focus of the manual is short-term volunteerism. The manual is divided into two sections: one for those inviting volunteers to a location, and one for churches preparing to send volunteers. You will find helpful information and checklists that should facilitate the planning process. The free download is available at www.namb.net/mission-trip-resources.

Woman's Missionary Union®: WMU is an organization that strives to challenge Christian believers to understand and be radically involved in the mission of God. WMU has multiple missions organizations, approaches, and

resources. To learn more and download free videos about WMU, visit www.wmu.com.

Women on Mission®: This is a missions organization for women (ages eighteen and up) through which women pray for and give to missions, do missions, learn about missions, and grow spiritually toward a missions lifestyle. Visit www.womenonmission.com.

World Changers: This group for Christian youth and adults seeks to provide a dynamic, week-long missions experiences in the USA. Visit www.namb.net.

WorldCrafts℠: This is a nonprofit ministry that imports handcrafts from around the world and markets them in the USA. WorldCrafts items are produced in nonexploitative conditions by artisans who are paid a fair wage. Visit www.worldcraftsvillage.com.

World Hunger Posters, Videos, Inserts and Ads: These are available at www.worldhungerfund.com.

Youth on Mission: For boys and girls in grades seven through twelve, this group equips youth to be dynamic, relevant, caring witnesses of Christ to a lost and needy world. Visit www.youthonmission.com.

Other Missions Resources

Baptist World Alliance is a global movement of Baptists sharing a common confession of faith in Jesus Christ who network together to impact the world for Christ. Visit www.bwanet.org.

Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. Visit www.bread.org.

Caleb Project develops media tools and training resources to equip the body of Christ for strategic ministry to unreached peoples. Visit www.calebproject.org.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is a fellowship of Baptist Christians and churches who share a passion for the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and a commitment to Baptist principles of faith and practice. Visit www.thefellowship.info.

E3 Partners offers a biblically-based approach to world missions. The focus is church multiplication, incorporating all the key elements of Christ's commission of going, making disciples, teaching, and baptizing in order to plant and grow new churches. Visit www.e3partners.org.

Faith Comes by Hearing uses heart-language audio Bibles to bring His church together and make disciples of every tribe, nation, language, and people. Visit www.faithcomesbyhearing.com.

Perspectives is a course offered at regional world missions centers, examining perspectives on global outreach and mission. Visit www.perspectives.org.

Samaritan's Purse's most prominent project is Operation Christmas Child, in which shoeboxes are filled with gifts for children. Visit www.samaritanspurse.org.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families, and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Visit www.wvi.org.

Chapter 9



CURRICULUM THAT MAKES DISCIPLES

Ross West, D. Min.

What are we trying to do to these people? The question may be stated a bit crassly, but it quickly gets to the beginning point for considering Christian education in general and curriculum in particular. Perhaps asking it this way would be better: *What is* the church *trying to do to* help *these people?* Even better, *What is the church trying to do to enable people to journey toward Christlikeness—to truly being Jesus' disciples—in their pilgrimage of faith?*

In his book *The Divine Conspiracy,* church leader and philosophy professor Dallas Willard writes of "A Curriculum for Christlikeness."[291] For we Christians, is that not definitely a needed curriculum? Perhaps we could phrase it "A Curriculum for Discipleship," knowing that what is in view in being Jesus' disciple is being Jesus' follower, learner, and even apprentice so that we might become more like him. As Paul wrote, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1, NASB).

In speaking of the need for such a curriculum, a curriculum that moves us toward Christlikeness, Willard uses the image of learning to ride a bicycle. He states, "When you teach children or adults to ride a bicycle or swim, they actually do ride bikes and swim. … You don't just teach them that they *ought* to ride bicycles, or that it is *good* to ride bicycles, or that they should be ashamed if they don't."[292]

Unfortunately—continuing to use the metaphor of learning to ride a bicycle—much of our efforts in Christian education seem aimed at teaching people a fair amount about bicycles, including their history, how they're

made, and even what people look like when they're riding bicycles. We also tend to try to make people feel they ought to ride a bicycle and that it would really be good to ride one, although—wink, wink—actually doing so is not really necessary. But do people ever get on their bicycles and ride? If the result of the church's efforts is to be that people actually ride bicycles, though, then that has great implications for what happens in many areas of church life. Curriculum, including a curriculum plan and curriculum resources, is at or near the top of the list.

As we move into this discussion of "Curriculum That Makes Disciples," some definitions seem in order.

Curriculum, Curriculum Plan, and Curriculum Resources

Often in church life, *curriculum* is confused with *curriculum materials*, generally meaning from what publisher the church will get curriculum materials or what book or other study resource a given group will use for a study. Practically speaking, for most churches, curriculum does eventually need to be narrowed down to just that—from what source or sources the church will get curriculum materials or what book or other study resource a given group will use for a study. But that needs to be the end of the discussion, not the beginning.

So *what is curriculum?* Check the dictionary and you will see that curriculum is much broader than merely curriculum materials. One dictionary[293] defines the word curriculum in these two ways:

1. the courses offered by an educational institution
2. a set of courses constituting an area of specialization

The same dictionary goes further, though. It reveals that the word *curriculum* is derived from a Latin expression that is even broader than these definitions. The Latin expression refers not simply to study materials or to a course of study but to *the course of one's life*. Well come back to this in a moment, for this concept has significant implications for the theme of this chapter and for the study approach of a church.

What is a curriculum plan? Of course, what we are mainly concerned about in this chapter is a church curriculum that is formal, intentional, and concerned with definite courses of study supported by helpful study materials. A curriculum plan is a plan for giving focus and structure to the

learning, shaping, and formation a person is to experience in becoming a disciple and growing in discipleship.

What are curriculum materials or resources? Curriculum materials convey the content of the curriculum plan in detail. The materials provide the content of the curriculum plan in small pieces that can be studied in a group session or a limited series of sessions, generally with guidance for leading the sessions.

Curriculum—the Course of One's Life

One implication of understanding curriculum as the course of one's life is that this definition can help us see that curriculum is more than curriculum materials and more than simply a series of courses. Rather, curriculum refers in the broadest sense to all the experiences in the course of our lives. Such a definition sees life itself as a learning, shaping, formational experience. What happens in church in Christian education activities and groups must contribute to that learning, shaping, formational experience rather than ignore it or deny it. Whether this broad definition of curriculum resonates with your understanding or not, it is a way of emphasizing the reality that life for the people who come to learning activities at the church meeting place will always include more than what happens at that location. What we must hope for is that Christian education experiences provide something of a prism for seeing all of life from Christ's perspective and growing in our appreciation of and participation in that perspective.

An additional implication of this broader definition of curriculum calls us to see that participants in intentional learning efforts in the church bring with them the results of learning projects beyond church, whether that means formal degrees or personalized learning projects. To name only a few examples, babies and toddlers are learning to walk, to use language, and to grow in social skills. Children are learning to read. Teenagers are figuring out who they are and what their roles in life are and are to be. Adults have learned and continue to learn from a vast smorgasbord of interests. Each person who comes to the church house brings along a vast collection of learnings and experiences that have shaped and are shaping his or her life.

So as we think about curriculum, we do well to remember that learners do not come to church as blank slates but with much already recorded and being recorded on them from multiple other sources. Rather than resist this reality, curriculum within the church should recognize it and use it to shape

learners further toward Christlikeness. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew and then James and John to follow him (Matthew 4:18—22), he didn't tell them to forget all they knew about fishing. Rather he called them to a new kind of fishing—fishing for people for Jesus' sake.

A further implication of this broad understanding of curriculum is that it encourages us to recall that much of the learning we do in life, including in church life, is *by-the-way* learning—learning that occurs when we're not intending to learn, when we're not involved in a formal course of study, and when we're not using what we ordinarily think of as curriculum resources.[294] We absorb such learning from relationships both positive and negative and from experiences of both joy and sorrow. Such by-the-way learning, shaping, and formation result from the tones we hear and the hues we see in our relationships and experiences. It can be expressed in the well-worn but still true statement that people will never care how much we know until they know how much we care. If our only concern in what we call Christian education is a rather heavy-handed indoctrination into a certain viewpoint, we will fall far short of providing learning experiences that truly make disciples of Jesus as he instructed us to do (Matt. 28:19—20).

As we turn our attention to a curriculum plan and curriculum materials, let us not forget to recognize that such a plan must acknowledge and—even better—make use of the learnings that already have occurred and are simultaneously occurring beyond the church's curriculum plan. Learning to follow Christ is a process of drawing to submission to Christ all the experiences and opportunities that we have, rather than separating ourselves from them or acting as if they'd never happened. Paul's great learning once led him to oppose Christianity. Thanks to the tutelage and encouragement of Ananias and Barnabas, it could be used to advance Christianity (Acts 9).

A Curriculum Plan

A curriculum plan is just that—a plan. It is a roadmap to a destination. Generally the trip is considered a fairly lengthy one, with movement from one place to another. The ultimate destination is always kept in mind, but the journey itself is part of the destination.

A church can buy from a publisher this curriculum plan embedded in curriculum materials if it wishes. Or it can adopt and use the curriculum plan and accompanying curriculum materials from another church or consortium

of churches (the denomination, for example). Likely most churches will need to get their curriculum plan and curriculum materials from outside sources, for few churches have the resources to invest in developing a quality curriculum plan and quality resources on their own. The results would be infinitely better, though, if before buying such a curriculum plan from outside sources the church took time to think deeply about what needs to be in its very own curriculum plan.

What factors should be considered in developing a curriculum plan? Consider these: purpose; appropriateness to age and developmental stage; scope; sequence; balance in the study; and attractiveness.

Purpose. A church's curriculum plan should be based first of all on what it is trying to accomplish with people. (Recall the first paragraph of this chapter.) We may find different words, but can we do any better than Jesus' command to us in Matthew 28:19—20? Jesus told us, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NASB). A curriculum plan should reflect this command. Paraphrase it in your own words, but surely it means that a church curriculum plan should at the very least—and perhaps at the very most—*help people in ways appropriate to the various stages of life become Jesus' disciples, learn to follow all that He instructed, and live in His presence.*

Perhaps an additional factor to be considered in a curriculum plan is the church's sense of its identity and its participation in God's mission. No doubt much time has been spent and sometimes wasted in recent years by groups of people in various settings—corporations as well as churches—trying to develop a brief, memorable, and at the same time comprehensive statement of that organization's mission. Many mission statements hammered out in endless meetings have been dutifully adopted and readily ignored after the meeting at which they were adopted. At the same time, though, much benefit has come to many organizations—churches included—from trying to get in mind and state in words exactly who they were and what they were trying to do.[295] Such self-understanding can pay great dividends in many areas of church life, especially in the area of developing and deciding on a curriculum plan so the church will be more intentional and systematic rather than haphazard or chaotic about its efforts in Christian education.

One Christian leader suggests a congregation deal with questions such as these in developing an understanding of its identify and its mission.

- "Our congregation's basic reason for existing is…"
- "Because of our congregation's dream, we will minister by…"
- "The…people we will minister to are…"[296]

One element in a church's curriculum plan reasonably should have to do with providing learning experiences for helping the congregation achieve its mission.

Here are some expressions of the purpose of Christian education from an influential book on the subject:

- The purpose of educational ministry is to develop within persons an understanding of, commitment to, and ability to practice Christian teachings.[297]
- To lead people to trust in Christ, grow toward mature discipleship, and be equipped for the work of ministry.[298]
- To make disciples and lead them to live and serve under the lordship of Christ.[299]
- To (1) bring people to Jesus Christ, and (2) help them grow in his likeness.[300]

In *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in California, suggests five questions to ask about a church's Christian education efforts. Each question and all of the questions as a whole relate to purpose.

- "Are people learning the content and meaning of the Bible?
- Are people seeing themselves, life, and other people more clearly from God's perspective?
- Are people's values becoming more aligned with God's values?
- Are people becoming more skilled in serving God?
- Are people becoming more like Christ?"[301]

Appropriateness to age and developmental stage. One curriculum plan is likely not going to fit every age group and life situation. Curriculum plans

need to be developed with attention to the age and developmental stage of specific groups.

Sometimes when a curriculum plan is developed for adults and perhaps extended to youth, well-meaning people desire to extend it further to children and even to the early childhood years. Because of the varying needs of the different age groups, attempting to impose one curriculum plan on the entire lifespan of people is unwise and results in one or more age groups being shortchanged. If the focus is on studies that meet the needs of children, adults will not be able to consider the full range of learning they need for their life situation. If the focus in curriculum development is on studies that meet the needs of adults, the early childhood and children's age groups will be faced with topics and themes they are not ready to deal with developmentally. Each age group—early childhood and children; youth; and adults—needs a curriculum plan of its own. At the same time, attention should be given to how these plans flow into each other and relate to each other.

Scope. What needs to be in the curriculum plan? For each age group, the scope of the study should be all of the subjects and skills necessarily for achieving the purpose of the study in ways appropriate to that age group. Subjects and skills in the area of Christian discipleship vary among the age groups because of each age group's life needs and developmental stage.

Sequence. The curriculum plan should indicate the sequence of the study. What should be studied first? What should be studied next? Some elements of the curriculum plan will build on others and thus are like stair-steps. Obviously, prerequisites should be studied first. On the other hand, the sequence of some subjects or skills in a curriculum plan may not matter. They do not necessarily build on each other but rather are simply other elements—other subjects or skills—and thus are like spokes in a bicycle wheel. The next item—balance—affects the sequence in this case.

Balance in the study. A curriculum plan should attempt to achieve balance in the way subjects are studied. If the plan includes studying the books of the Bible, balance would mean balancing the study of Old Testament books with the study of New Testament books. Balance would mean, too, studying differing types of biblical literature within a given period of time. For example, the Book of Revelation might be an attractive area of study from time to time, but studying this book needs to be balanced with the study of other areas of Scripture.

Attractiveness. Participating in church studies is a voluntary activity, especially for adults but also for many youth and children. Since that is so, the attractiveness of the curriculum plan and of the studies within it is important. The reality is that many people won't come or won't come back if they don't perceive that the study is meeting their needs and is attractive to them, no matter how sound the study appears to the planners. For example, a hallmark of Baptists is that they say they believe the Bible completely and base their beliefs and actions on it. They may well do that, but the reality is that when it comes to group Bible study, they are ho-hum about Nahum and generally do not have a burning desire to study this biblical book, among others. So the curriculum plan and the studies within it need to have a measure of attractiveness, or having people volunteer to participate in them is unlikely.

Curriculum Resources

Curriculum resources carry the details of the curriculum plan. Curriculum resources come in different forms and formats. They may be print, electronic, audio, or visual, for example. They may be experience-based, as in learning to minister through hands-on experiences on a mission trip.

Curriculum resources are intended to accomplish these tasks:

- Provide help in organizing and understanding a given area of study
- Provide learners with resources for achieving the goals of the study
- Provide leaders with directions for guiding the study

Developing quality curriculum materials requires much investment of time and resources. Therefore, the vast majority of churches will find it to be the best stewardship of their time and money to find and obtain curriculum materials developed by publishers that specialize in Christian education resources. Churches thus will need to be prepared to evaluate the various offerings of curriculum materials. A simple evaluation might ask leaders, especially current teachers, specific questions. The results can then be tallied and used as the basis for further discussion and decision. See the list of questions in "Evaluating Curriculum Resources."

Evaluating Curriculum Resources

Apply each of these questions to each set of the curriculum materials you are considering, using the following scale:

1. Not at all satisfied 2. Slightly satisfied 3. Moderately satisfied 4. Very satisfied 5. Extremely satisfied

1. How well do the materials fit the developmental needs, abilities, and interests of the intended learners?
2. How well do the materials fit your church's theology?
3. How well do the materials fit the goals and emphases your church believes are important?
4. To what extent do the materials deal with the range of areas of learning your church wants to emphasize (scope)?
5. How balanced is the amount of emphasis the materials give to various areas of content? (Are you studying one area to the neglect of other areas?)
6. How well do the materials complement other materials your church uses for that age group and for other age groups?
7. To what extent does the material provide sufficient, understandable, easy-to-use assistance to teachers?
8. To what extent is the material provided in a manner that is accessible to teachers and learners? (Is it written well? Will teachers and learners identify with the written and visual illustrations and images?)
9. To what extent is the material attractive?
10. To what extent does the material seem to provide financial value? (Does it seem too expensive or about right given what is provided?)

The chart titled "Evaluating Adult Bible Study Curriculum Resources" provides an approach for evaluating Bible study curriculum resources for adults. Ask leaders, especially current teachers, to mark each question using the scale indicated. Then tally the results to provide a basis for further discussion and decision.

Evaluating Adult Bible Study Curriculum Resources

Apply each of these statements to each of the adult Bible study curriculum resources you are considering, using the following scale:

1. Not at all satisfied 2. Slightly satisfied 3. Moderately satisfied 4. Very satisfied 5. Extremely satisfied

1. The resource is attractive.
2. The resource provides good value financially.
3. The resource fits the theological viewpoint of the class and our church.
4. The resource fits the goals and emphases our church believes are important.
5. The resource has a good balance in studying different parts of the Bible.
6. The resource provides sound interpretation of the Bible.
7. The resource provides application to life.
8. The resource fits the abilities and interests of my class.
9. The resource provides teaching plans that are easy to use.
10. The resource provides adequate assistance for the teacher's preparation and use.

Summary

The importance of a broad view of curriculum, a sound curriculum plan, and helpful and attractive curriculum materials that meet the needs of people and are in line with the church's goals cannot be overestimated. They are essential tools for guiding people toward Christlikeness, helping them truly to become Jesus' disciples.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your church trying to do to enable people to journey toward Christlikeness—to truly being Jesus' disciples—in their pilgrimage of faith?
2. What *should* your church be trying to do to enable people to journey toward Christlikeness—to truly being Jesus' disciples—in their pilgrimage of faith?
3. Conduct the following project for one or more age groups in your church.
   a. Identify at least three publishers of curriculum materials that seem to fit the characteristics and needs of the church.

b. Review the curriculum materials from each publisher, using the evaluative instrument in “Evaluating Curriculum Resources” or “Evaluating Adult Bible Study Curriculum Resources” (or develop your own evaluation instrument).
c. Choose the materials to recommend.
d. Explain your reasoning for your recommendation.

For Further Reading

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PART 3

Who Needs to be Discipled?



Chapter 10



PRESCHOOL MINISTRY AND FAITH FORMATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Thomas Sanders, Ph.D.

In recent years, a growing discussion has developed related to the role of the church and the role of the family in the faith formation and discipleship of children. Some have even argued that the church and denominations seized the responsibility from parents by providing programs like Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, discipleship, and missions programs. Others might argue that the church merely attempted to come alongside parents to assist in the process of helping boys and girls become Christians and grow as Christians. In the materialistic, fast-paced, and outsourced culture of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, parents shifted the responsibility to the church as they did with other responsibilities such as day care and after-school programs. In addition, parents by the later preschool years have grown accustomed to taking their children to professionals to help them learn a skill or become more proficient at a sport. Faith becomes another arena where parents outsource their role.

In either of the prior scenarios, the reasons become less important than the fact that parents need to take an active role in the faith of their children. However, it would be an overstatement to say that the church does not share responsibility for teaching and guiding young children to follow Christ. Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is often the main biblical argument for the primacy of the home in biblical instruction. The home in this ancient setting was not suburbia with neat fences and green space for walks and playing. The setting

for families of the Torah was a rich community of faith with a network of extended families dependent on one another for physical safety, food production, housing, government, and faith.[302] In a sense, the children of one family were the children of the community of faith. The clarion call of Deuteronomy 6 was not a call to parents alone but a call to the nation to take seriously the instruction of the youngest and to see that instruction pervaded every aspect of life.[303] Churches cannot use their renewed understanding of this passage as a reason to do less for young children and their families. In practical terms, the community of faith cannot say that only the parents are responsible for guiding children in matters of faith. The Great Commission and the call of Acts 1:8 for Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, includes an emphasis on those who are near—even in the home and church.

In looking at the place of children in the context of the Old Testament, Walter Brueggemann argues that the purpose of the Old Testament canon was to give Jewish children a sense of identity as followers of YHWH.[304] The stories of sacrifice, heroics, miracles, mistakes, and dependence were to help Jewish boys and girls identify with their families, community of faith, and God. As parents read the stories of the Old Testament and live out the same in their lives, young children learn the value and pattern of their parents' faith in a way that it eventually becomes *their* faith. Horace Bushnell in *Christian Nurture* makes the same argument about the role of parents and the role of the church. His views on infant baptism and his concern about radical conversion of children caused the wholesale dismissal of his argument and recommendations, but one hundred years later, Baptists began to mirror many of his practices.[305] Bushnell recommended that even from the earliest stages of life—even prenatal—children are learning to trust parents in a way that lays a foundation for trusting God later in life. He goes on to say that the only way a child will understand the sacrifice of Christ is to see a parent sacrificing for him or her and for their faith. One of Bushnell's most enduring legacies was an emphasis on the learners' needs and understanding. Horace Bushnell wanted boys and girls to be taught what they could understand and use rather than be subjected to a teaching style that focuses on mere memorization of facts or theological theorems that they can little understand or act on in daily life.

When the church endeavors to create a teaching ministry for preschoolers, there must be a clear focus on helping parents becoming the

primary teacher of their children. This cannot simply be a slogan; it must be a practical and intentional process that starts with the pastor in the pulpit. When pastors begin to address the role of the parent in application and example, begin to talk with parents about their roles as parents to their children, and look at the biblical narrative for models of parent and child interaction, every week then will the community of faith begin to take the faith formation of children, their parents, and the home more seriously. Churches can begin to require parenting classes as a prerequisite for parent-child dedication. These parenting classes should avoid repeating information that parents receive from their local medical provider before pregnancy. Rather, the classes need to consider the parents as pastors to the child. A word of caution here: in early childhood there is always the risk of making events or programs too feminine and risk alienating fathers. This is why considering having men and women in teaching parents and children is so important. Dr. James Sullivan, the president of the Baptist Sunday School Board (1953–1975), now LifeWay Christian Resources, often told the story of his own realization that every class needed a male teacher because in this way the room mirrors the home and what the home should be like for young children.

When instructing parents, the church's leadership team should consider the following issues: how to use the Bible with preschoolers; discipline as foundation to discipleship and moral behavior; prayer in the home; key developmental stages and the implications for faith; the goals of Bible study at church; and the role parents can play at church. The parental instruction should not be limited to a seminar at birth but should have ongoing issues through the development of the child and the parent. Providing mentors for parents will reinforce the importance of biblical parenting. Forming lunch meetings for fathers, morning meetings for mothers, or groups for single parents will support the development of all involved.

In looking at the church for the children in their early childhood years, the best place to start is with the assumption that children at all ages are learning. Recently there has been much discussion about what babies are learning.[306] While some of the research has led to media products with dubious claims, the assertion that preschoolers, even infants, are learning before they know how to speak can hardly be denied. The question is, "What is the church teaching them?"

In looking at how the church can teach young children or preschoolers, the first place to begin is with the needs of these children. In the twentieth century, Piaget, Erikson, Vygotsky, Kohlberg, Fowler, and others began to describe a developmental process of growth and learning. Since then, there has been considerable discussion about these stages and the general age ranges attached to them. Even with these concerns, the value of understanding general childhood development is essential to teaching effectively. In this chapter, instead of looking at ages and stages, the focus will be on needs that arise from the developmental stages and ways of learning that dictate a model of teaching.

Trust

One hundred years before Erik Erikson[307] began to describe the first crisis of life, trust versus mistrust, Horace Bushnell described the exact same crisis. Instead of linking this crisis to human psychosocial development alone, he linked it to faith formation. In Bushnell's observation of children, he noted that children needed to begin to trust the individuals closest to them. The need for trust is not only psychosocial in nature but is related to physical and mental needs as well. When children are fed or have had their diapers changed when needed, they in return begin to trust others. These tangible acts form experiences that become patterns of need-meeting and need-meeting expectations. The children begin not only to trust but to expect this from those around them. Bushnell describes this trust as the beginning of faith formation. When Bushnell wrote at first of the importance of the parent-child relationship, Christians and theologians rejected it. The idea that parents and important others were in the first stages of life impersonating God was very controversial to his contemporaries. This burden may not have been a pressure parents were willing to accept. Research by more recent scholars like Ana-Maria Rizzutto underscores this foundational nature of parents and important others in the formation of images of God.[308]

For this reason again, the church must develop strategies to help parents become more like Christ in order for children to know Christ more effectively. This is also the reason churches must develop the best practices for teaching preschoolers and emphasizing the need for a child to develop trust in parents and teachers from the first days of life. This is why the call for consistent, caring teachers is so important. Securing teachers who will

teach infants, toddlers, twos, threes, fours, fives, and kindergarten age is often difficult, and churches turn to hiring or outsourcing individuals who may not even be Christians and probably would not come to church unless paid. Do you want infants and toddlers to grow up to be like these individuals? Do these individuals exemplify God?

Selecting teachers who are willing to teach and be consistent provides an environment where children can begin to trust people at church. These people again represent God to the young child. Their willingness to sacrifice time each week to serve and teach on Sunday morning allows the child to see not only the value that the teachers place on him or her but also on their commitment to Christ. Teachers who rotate through teaching only once or twice a month may not provide the kind of consistency that children need to trust individuals at church.

In recent years, there has been less emphasis on teacher-child ratios. Having appropriate teacher-child ratios for the children in attendance allows again for the child to develop a relationship with the teacher and, quite frankly, to be known. When there are too many children and not enough teachers in the room, the ability to care for physical needs becomes primary, and the opportunity to teach biblical truths becomes optional at best. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory supports this principle in that a child cannot move toward personal growth and learning unless the basic needs are met. When rooms are crowded, the best that teachers can often do is to keep children safe.

The chart titled "Guidelines for Preschool Age Groupings" contains teacher-child ratios, space requirements, and enrollment guidelines. These guidelines can assist in setting up a preschool Bible study organization that provides for optimal trust-building and teaching.

Guidelines for Preschool Age Groupings

Age Groupings	Adult/Child Ratios	Maximum Group Sizes
Babies–Twos	1:3	12
Threes–Kindergarten	1:4	16

In order to provide trust, the church should also make sure that the individuals are trustworthy. A yearly criminal background check for workers, along with having at least two teachers in every room at all times,

not only helps the child develop trust in the people at church, but it also helps the parents develop trust in the people at church.

Trust also relates to the images teachers portray about God. As the saying goes, first impressions are lasting impressions. Children at this age are not only forming their images of God from their experiences with adults but also from how adults present God through their conversation and selection of Bible stories. Teachers and ministry leaders should be careful to select passages that preschoolers can understand without a great deal of explanations. Long clarifications often outlast the attention span of young minds. Also, the Bible content should not scare or purposely confuse the child. Such stories as Abraham offering Isaac, David killing Goliath, and Jericho being destroyed might be scary to a preschooler. Teachers and parents should think about what they want the child to learn from the story. The David and Goliath story can be confusing to a two-year-old at a time when adults are helping them learn to use their words instead of fists or rocks. One more caveat for this discussion: Parents and teachers often remark that their preschooler or a preschooler they know has no problem understanding scary or confusing stories. This may be very true, but the reason for that understanding is usually that the child is in an environment where this type of dialogue is often going on. On the surface, the child can discuss the details because the atmosphere has provided support for understanding familiarity at some level, but this is not the case with every child, even with this same type of support. The goal of a Bible-teaching session is to teach and speak in a way that the majority of the children can reach a clear understanding.

One final thought about trust and children or people in general: even for adults entering new situations, the need to develop trust in a new boss, workplace, small group Bible study, or church is a lifelong process. When children experience change, they often revert to the need to establish trust first. For some children this may be more difficult because of life experience or personality. Teachers must work to establish trust first in order to help boys and girls learn and explore the truths of the Bible.

Initiative

For some time in education, there has been a strong emphasis on self-esteem to the point that researchers looking at trends in young adults assess that adolescents and young adults develop the overstated feeling of

entitlement.[309] As children turn one year of age, they begin to separate physically from their parents and adults. As they grow older, their independence moves from physical separation to more of mental separation where instead of hitting or acting out, they begin to ask questions and form plans to test ideas and boundaries. Developing initiative is good for children, but it must happen within the environment of consistent expectations, appropriate choices, and logical consequences for choices. The key for teachers and leaders is to provide teaching materials, activities, and rooms that allow children to gain a sense of accomplishment, to develop an appropriate level of freedom for the room and for the age, and to begin to understand their own God-given giftedness.

By providing a variety of activities like home-living, nature, blocks, puzzles, books, music, and art, teachers are allowing children to learn by playing—purposeful playing. Each Sunday, teachers are encouraged to look at curriculum materials to provide suggestions for the age group, but ultimately they must develop the curriculum by working with the children in the learning environment. The preschool room actually allows preschool teachers to set up the exact model of Deuteronomy 6. Deuteronomy specifies types of activities where teaching becomes a teachable moment in connecting the truth of the Bible with life experiences. When teachers set up the environment that fosters teachable moments, the message and the model of the passage take shape. If the Bible story is about Miriam taking care of baby Moses and the aim is to help boys and girls understand that they can help their family, then the teachers can set up activities that mirror the Bible passage and real life. This form of purposeful play allows the children to reenact the Bible story and how the story can be lived out today. In many churches, these activities will actually be learning centers in a room, but for churches that meet in less institutional settings, activities in these categories do not need specific equipment or areas of the room designated for them. One word of caution: Some teachers view play and teaching as two different concepts. They allow the children to “free play” until the teachers are ready to “teach” through a planned activity. This approach wastes valuable time and ignores the fact that when children are playing they are learning. The question is, What are teachers teaching? For assistance in selecting biblical truths and teaching aims for preschoolers at different stages, please refer to the *Levels of Biblical Learning*.[310]

Allowing children to learn the Bible story, the Bible phrases related to the story, and teaching aim through a variety of teaching methods helps children discover the biblical truth through activities that are meaningful to them. The trap for teachers is that they often measure the success of the session by an art activity or a craft. The process of teaching is far more important than the product the child makes. The risk teachers fall into is that they become so involved in the making of a project or craft that there is little discussion and engagement with the biblical narrative or truth. Instead, the child has made something that will soon be discarded and will have learned little of lasting value.

With all the tools available to teachers in the early childhood years, leaders may find themselves moving away from an emphasis on the biblical narratives or valuable relationships without knowing this. Technology is an amazing advance for homes, schools, and churches, but what is happening is that parents and even churches are defaulting to putting children in front of a screen at very early ages. The Kaiser Family Foundation's study on media in the lives of children and adolescents found that by ages five to six, 43% of children had a television in their rooms and the main reason seems to be convenience.[311] Media cannot replace relational teaching grounded in the use and application of Scripture. At home, the reason for this choice includes the assumption that children's programming in their rooms is more appropriate than what adults watch or because it provides a form of a break for parents. In the church, media can take up time that previously may have required preparation and additional leaders.

If churches decide to use media with preschoolers, certain boundaries should be placed on content and amount of use. The content should be correct biblically. There is no excuse for allowing a biblical story to be trivialized or made incorrect in the name of entertainment. Preschoolers are at a stage where determining what is real and not real is difficult. Placing the truths of the Bible in a context where they may be equated with Cinderella or Rapunzel in the mind of a child is a dangerous practice. Would pastors invite speakers into their church who purposefully preached something incorrect just to draw a crowd or get a laugh? In addition, work to select resources that portray persons in the Bible as real people, not as cartoon characters. Boys and girls need to know that the people in the Bible were real. Preschoolers especially deserve advocates who will take seriously the selection of leaders, teachers, and curriculum.

Finally, using the Bible with preschoolers of all ages is essential. Providing real Bibles in every preschool room is important as boys and girls begin to associate all their experiences at church with the Bible. Bible-story books are poor replacements. Select Bibles with illustrations where the people look real. Using the New International Reader's Version (NIrV), which has a readability level of second grade, allows for early readers to begin to read the words and for better use with preschoolers of every age.[312] The Bible should be read in appropriate lengths and content to children every time they come to church, even when a more contemporary telling of the story is provided. Young minds need early training to expect to stop and pause for the reading of Scripture.

Discussion Questions

1. From reading this chapter, develop a list of character traits and expectations for enlisting leaders to teaching preschoolers. Don't forget that attendance should be a clear expectation.
2. Select Bible stories that you think are appropriate for babies and ones, twos and threes, fours, fives, and kindergarten. Write a brief sentence that describes what you want the child to learn from this passage. This is your target or teaching aim. Now, develop five activities that support both your sentence and Bible story. Finally, reread the Bible passage. What sections of the story can you pause and read to the children during the course of the session?
3. Take a walk around your preschool classrooms. What are your first impressions? Is the environment clean and inviting to the children and their parents? Think about how you or your fellow teachers greet the preschoolers. Is there a focus on the Bible passage and truth from the first moment the child arrives to the last? How does your church train leaders and parents to teach preschoolers?

Recommended Preschool Equipment

Symbols:
x recommended
o optional

The ALL column is specialized equipment that a church may want to purchase in limited quantity (one or two per church) for use by all ages.

Equipment	B	1	2	3	4	K	ALL	B–2	3–K	B–K
General										
Cribs (hospital 27" x 42")	x	o						x		x
Adult rocking chair (2)	x							x		x
Solid surface floor mat (42" x 42")	x									
Wall cabinet (50" above floor)	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Trash receptacles with lid	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Diaper bag cubbies or hooks	x	x	x							
Vinyl changing pad		x	x							
Open shelf/closed back for toys (26" x 36" x 12")		o						o		o
Water source for disinfecting	x	x	x					x		x
Slow cookers or Bottle warmers	x							x		x
Rocking boat with enclosed steps		o								
Small countertop refrigerator	o									
4 Tables (24" x 36" x 22")			x	x						
4 Tables (24" x 36" x 24")					x	x			x	x
10–15 chairs (10")			x	x						
15–20 chairs (12"–14")					x	x			x	x
Homeliving/Dramatic Play										
Horizontal unbreakable mirror 24" x 48" attached to wall	x							o		
Vertical unbreakable mirror 24" x 48" attached to wall		x	x	x	x	x			o	o
Wooden doll bed (16" x 28" x 8")		o	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Child-size rocker		o	x	x	x	x			x	x
Wooden sink			x	x	x	x			x	x
Wooden stove			x	x	x	x			x	x

Equipment	B	1	2	3	4	K	ALL	B–2	3–K	B–K
Music										
Cassette/CD player	x	x	x	x	x	x		o	o	o
Rhythm instruments							x			
Blocks										
Cardboard or vinyl blocks		x	x					x		
Wooden unit blocks (various shapes and sizes)										
1. 29–70 pieces				x					x	x
2. 100–150 pieces					x	x				
Open shelf/closed back (26" x 36" x 12")			o	x	x	x			x	x
Art										
Table (30" x 48" x 22")			x	x					x	x
Table (30" x 48" x 24")					x	x				
Art Easel			x	x	x	x			o	o
Water source at child's height for cleanup			x	x	x	x			x	x
Art shelf (36" x 46" x 16")						x				
Nature/Science										
Open shelf with closed back (26" x 30" x 12")				x	x	x			o	o
Water table (1 per church)							o			
Manipulatives/Puzzles										
Puzzle rack				o	o	o			o	o

Adapted from *Teaching Preschoolers: First Steps toward Faith.* Thomas Sanders and Mary Ann Bradberry.[313]

Chapter 11



LEADING THE FORMATION OF CHILDREN

Thomas Sanders, Ph.D.

In chapter ten, “Preschool Ministry and Faith Formation in Early Childhood,” the argument for beginning with Deuteronomy 6 presents a dual responsibility for the faith formation of children. This responsibility is primarily with parents and supported by the equally committed community of faith. But what of the child? What does the Scripture record of the child? In Matthew 18, Jesus set the ancient worldview on its head by using a child as a symbol of what all people must become or *change* into in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.[314] Children were of little value to the greater world outside Judaism. The Jewish culture valued children in greater ways than the culture at large, but children were still seen as significantly less important than adults.

By selecting a child in this passage, Jesus was stressing the dependency of the child, for in the Roman culture and others, the life of a child was at the discretion of the parents.[315] The child’s life or death was in the parents’ hands. In the same way, all people must recognize their complete dependence on God and that fellow believers must welcome all who want to trust in Christ and take seriously the stewardship of guiding them on the right path. While in this text children symbolize all who would come to Jesus, the implication is an inclusion of children. This passage holds the community of faith as a guarantor that ministry, teaching, and witnessing to children will be at least on the same level as adults and in the call of the disciples of the New Testament. Anything less is punishable by an unhappy

experience with a large stone. In this context of importance, childhood ministry and formation must be considered as essential to the child, the church, and the kingdom.

This Year's Models

Today's children's ministry, as some might argue, is not your mother's children's ministry. In some churches, giant whale-shaped slides dump children into large nickelodeon-style theaters; there are fire engine baptisteries; and time machines take children back to Bible times. The new theatrical aspects do provide a significant change from the traditional Sunday School self-contained classes with a director and teachers who teach a group of twenty or so children in the same grade. Recent models for teaching put large groups of children from a wide range of grades in much bigger theater-style rooms. A performance-based segment with a host introduces the biblical content, and then children go to small groups with one small group leader to discuss the experience.

Those who are old enough to remember the nursery, primary, and junior programs before the Shaping the Seventies emphasis for Southern Baptists may also remember that during those times children in a wide range of ages, or even all ages, came together each Sunday for assembly. Then they went to small groups with a teacher, sometimes in very small cubical rooms. Yes, the new models look structurally more like your grandmother's model for Bible study than your mother's. In some ways, the old has become new.

The theater style of teaching the Bible is not the only recent approach. Michael Anthony along with four other authors in *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation*[316] describe four models for spiritual formation in the church setting: Contemplative-Reflective, Instructional-Analytical, Pragmatic-Participatory, and Media-Drive Active Engagement. In the course of their text, each author or proponent takes point/counterpoint arguments. Value may be discovered in each model, but how do leaders go about deciding how to lead the faith formation of children? Does one size fit all? [317]

In the midst of the changing models of teaching children the Bible, what can children's ministry leaders do to ensure that each new model, trend, or curriculum provides lifelong spiritual transformation? Part of what makes the changes somewhat concerning is that children's curriculum used to be provided by denominational publishers as a means of fortifying faith and

denominational distinctive, but it has now become a multimillion-dollar business for anyone who wants to enter the market. Vacation Bible School resources are now not only a flagship for evangelism but of marketing and sales. Small publishers and even large churches are moving with haste to garner their corner of the market among evangelicals and mainline churches. All this complicates the issue because there are so many tradeoffs. One curriculum or model may offer the Bible content and theological grounding desired but not the flash and entertainment that seems characteristic of children's events and places.

One of the main arguments for the changing philosophy and models of faith formation in boys and girls is that children have changed. A few years ago, Greenleaf Press looked at the current world a little differently. Their take was, "Children have not changed. Childhood has." This alternate perspective offers leaders in childhood ministry an opportunity to affirm the basic needs of children and also realize that the culture around children has morphed. Who are the children in today's childhood? In describing this generation of children, perhaps a foundation can be laid for prescribing a ministry that will provide faith formation. The following paragraphs will provide descriptions and then possible prescriptions for developing ministry design.

Description: Connected but not in community. Children today are connected in many ways, and in these connections the misconception is formed that they are in relationships that provide meaningful support for their development and growth. According to a Kaiser Family Foundation Study published in 2010, 31% of children ages eight to twelve have cell phones and 69% of children ages eleven to fourteen have cell phones.[318] Parents claim that the cell phone is a way to stay connected, but children are spending less time communicating and more time plugging in to electronic media downloads. Children often live in homes where they are shuffled off to their rooms equipped with gaming systems, the Internet, television, and even refrigerators. At this critical time in life, these children need to be forming relationships instead of forming connections with technology.

Prescription: Build on relationships. The key to building relationships is consistency. In the church environment, creating an atmosphere for relationship building is complicated due to colliding realities. The first is that it is difficult to enlist teachers and leaders who will be responsible each week. In turn, childhood ministry leaders resort to accepting people who will

teach on a rotating basis. The second reality is that in churches where there are multiple services, parents may choose to attend the service or Bible teaching time that fits their schedule from week to week rather than finding one time and committing to it.

Leaders have a choice: accept the realities or attempt to create a new culture that focuses on what is best for boys and girls. One way to do the latter is by focusing the attention of the church leadership and congregation on the benefits of consistency of leaders and children. In the elementary years, parents lose interest to some degree in what is happening to their children. Childhood ministry leaders must take care to train and cultivate parents. Avoid being negative; instead guide them to understand that children need role models who know their names and know them personally. They need individuals who will be consistent, accountable, and loving. Leaders in the children's ministry are not the only people in the faith community with whom children build relationships as a part of faith formation.

Here are some other guidelines for building relationships:

Large group gatherings. In large traditional churches with more than thirty elementary children enrolled, it is suggested that one class be created for each group of thirty children enrolled. Each class would have a lead teacher or director with two to three teachers or small group leaders. Children can be grouped by age level of one grade per class or one to three grades per class depending on overall numbers enrolled. The director or lead teacher would lead the large group time with all the children in the class, and teachers/small group leaders would provide Bible learning activities for a smaller group of six children.

In churches that use a theater-style large group experience with large numbers of children from the same age group or across the age groups, the best practice is to encourage small group leaders to sit with their assigned children during large group. In situations where the age range is broader than three grades, careful consideration must be given to selecting appropriate Bible content and methodology. Attempting to meet the Bible content and interests of more than three grades in one setting presents a challenge that may create an uncomfortable feeling among the youngest and boredom among the oldest.

Consistent small groups. Each small group should be set at the beginning of the church year with one or two consistent small group leaders/teachers.

Pay careful attention to the attendance patterns of the children. In building relationships, churches should look carefully at the ratio of teacher/leader to children. Typically, a ratio of one to six is the recommendation for attendance. There may be twelve children on the small group list or roll, but when small groups reach over ten in attendance with one leader, the ability to build relationships, have meaningful discussion, and teach the Bible is limited. In such situations, the small group leader becomes crowd controller instead of leader and teacher. Small groups may be larger if the church provides two small group leaders per group, but remember that the larger the small group, the less personal involvement the children will have in the discussion.

Teaching environment. Teaching environments can vary today from formal Sunday School classrooms to warehouse space. An attempt to make the environment appealing to children is important, but the space must not be overly stimulating or cluttered. Think of the room as a canvas that should support what teachers and leaders are teaching for that emphasis. The pendulum seems to be swinging back from extravagant playlands with animatronic creatures in some churches because after a few months, the children have seen all the tricks and it becomes an exercise in sameness—*been there, seen that.* One young minister once said after a significant investment in decorating the children's area, "After two years and thousands of dollars on decoration, it did not seem to matter to the children. I wish we had spent that money in other ways. We can't redo this every two to three years."

Churches should be good stewards of their finances and create spaces that are fun. These spaces, however, do not have to be theme parks in order for children to grow, learn, and enjoy. The key is what the teachers and leaders are doing in the space.

In considering chairs and tables, pay close attention to the size of them. If children cannot put their feet comfortably on the floor, they will be more likely to move and fidget. Younger elementary-age children need chairs with seats twelve to thirteen inches from the floor. Children in the middle years of the elementary age need chairs fourteen to fifteen inches. Preteen children need chairs with seats sixteen to seventeen inches from the floor. Tables should be ten inches above the seat. Chairs and tables are not always necessary. Children can sit on the floor if there is enough floor room. Some churches use chairs for their large group and small area rugs for each small

group. A best practice for elementary children is that they need twenty square feet per child.

Ministers and pastors. Ministers and pastors play a big role in the view of children. In qualitative research with children at Dallas Baptist University, we have discovered that children who attend worship feel they have a close relationship with the pastor even when they have little or no contact with the pastor. One child remarked that his favorite part of church is when the pastor puts his story in the big story. In other words, the child takes an interest in the personal stories of the pastor. This should be an encouragement to pastors to remember that the youngest of their congregation are indeed paying attention.

Description: Eleven hours of multi-media-tasking. According to the same study mentioned earlier by the Kaiser Family Foundation, children spend eight hours a day involved in media, but because they multi-media-task with computers, cell phones, television, music, and more, it is really like eleven hours. Over 71% of children have televisions in their own rooms with 64% reporting the television is on during meals and 45% reporting that it is on most of the time.

Prescription: Make teaching a first priority and use media wisely. Television and other media are a great part of life for information and entertainment, but the risk is that the church may use media as a default method with little thought to the implications. Instead, church leaders should use media purposefully and not routinely. Media can be a crutch or simply an easy way to avoid a deeper kind of preparation by leaders or a quick way to settle children down. Childhood ministry leaders should ask themselves these questions when making decisions about media:

- How often are we using the same form of media with children?
- Why are we using this media with children?
- Is the media replacing relationships with people in the family of faith? Would it be better to hear this content or story from the perspective of someone they know and have relationships with?
- Is the media filling time or helping us accomplish our purpose in Bible study?
- Do the children understand what they are viewing?
- Is the information leaving children with a correct understanding of the Bible passage or is it trivializing an important truth to entertain?

- Is this form of media appropriate for the age group? Does the media introduce behaviors or concepts that may set bad examples for the children?
- Does the media encourage participation or only passive watching?

Description: Old in experience and young in age. In the 2011 Kid's Choice Awards sponsored by Nickelodeon, parents and childhood ministry leaders might find it shocking that Katie Perry and the Black Eyed Peas were the top female solo artist and band respectively, topping Selena Gomes, Miley Cyrus, and the Jonas Brothers. This win should not surprise parents given that this generation of children are allowed to have cell phones and iPods, using them to download media more than talking or downloading songs. No wonder wildly popular *Glee* was built on the previous success of *High School Musical.* In the last ten years, there has been discussion of the age-compression factor. Mothers often complain of this when attempting to find age-appropriate clothing for an eight-year-old. Finally, consider an episode of the *New Superfriends* where Supergirl used the phrase "cop a feel."

Prescription: Know the culture of childhood and teach to transform both parent and child. Childhood ministry leaders must deliberately take time to read books and watch movies/TV programs that children are exposed to both in school and during leisure time. The themes of popular books and movies become an opportunity to contrast the truths of Scripture and, at times, to parallel the themes. Leonard Sweet commented that parents and adults are immigrants in this new age and that children and adolescents are natives.[319] The only way to really reach the natives is to know their culture. In like manner, helping parents know how to make good choices for their children is essential. Impact parents and we are impacting children.

Description: Value-driven curriculum. In taking an inventory of a large variety of curriculum and church-based programs in the last few years, one aspect is easy to see. The drive toward child-friendly experiences for children is appropriate in many ways, but the danger is creating an experience that is fun but lacks the focus of a biblical narrative and lifelong journey of faith. When curriculum moves to focus on character traits, virtues, and moralism, some might suggest that churches and leaders are leaning toward a therapeutic deism that makes faith seem like a feel-good experience, and yet it lacks the relationship, truth, and authority of a Scripture-based approach.

One way that this can be seen in curriculum is through wonderful-sounding phrases like “You can be anything you want to be.” In focusing on the American dream, Christians have left the focus on God and moved our children into a form of egocentrism that suggests that God exists to help Christians become what they want to become. A more consistent biblical reading might be “You can become anything God wants you to become.”

Prescription: Bible-based curriculum. This current generation of children specifically, and for developmental reasons most of the elementary-aged children as well, are drawn to stories or narratives. Curriculum that attempts to take some virtue from a didactic portion of Scripture and build a moralist experience application may find that they have given children very little to build understanding upon. I visited a church that had written their curriculum for elementary-aged children. The biblical truth from the experience was “Watch Your Mouth"—their interpretation of James’s admonishment on the proper use of conversation. Instead of focusing the children on a biblical narrative related to telling the truth, proper speech, and obeying God, they settled for an object lesson experience with a shallow basis in Scripture. Churches and church leaders should seek curriculum that focuses strongly on the biblical narratives and uses didactic passages as memory verses.

Bible study would be nothing without the Bible. Teachers and leaders must model the use of the Bible instead of resorting to the only place children see Scripture: on a screen or in a teacher’s book. These leaders can also create an environment where children want to bring their Bibles to church. In order to do this, the value and use of Scripture must be planned in every session in large group and small group. This emphasis is not just with the hands-on use of the Scripture but also with the reading of Scripture. Too often children hear only contemporary stories or paraphrases of Scripture. Instead, boys and girls need to pause each Sunday and hear some portion of Scripture read and be given a time for reflection. The Holy Spirit does speak to children, and what greater way to encourage this than to plan times to reverently read the Scripture and allow for silence and reflection.

With younger children this takes time and practice, but it is worthwhile because these patterns will serve boys and girls for a lifetime. Selecting easy-to-read translations like the New International Reader’s Version (NIrV)[320] provides ease and access for boys and girls and their families. The easy path to take today is to provide the Scripture on screens or on take-

home leaflets. When children highlight and read verses for themselves, foundations are being laid for personal Bible study. Finally, one concern that should cause interest for all Christians is a church where the only people who have and use the Scripture are the people on the stage. This is eerily like the place of the church in the Middle Ages when even priests like Martin Luther did not read or have access to the Scripture. Only the highest leaders read and interpreted Scripture.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the children in your ministry? Looking at the descriptions provided in this chapter, which characteristics match the children in your ministry? What would you add to the descriptions?
2. How would you describe the children's ministry in your church? Looking at the provided descriptions related to teaching children, which characteristics match your ministry?
3. In looking at your ministry to children, which prescriptions would assist you in improving your ministry to children through Bible teaching?
4. Observe your ministry to children this next Sunday. How do children and adults use the Bible? Are you encouraging lifelong use and love of Scripture?
5. Use the "Children's Bible Study Evaluation Guide" to set goals and action plans for your ministry.

Children's Bible Study Evaluation Guide

- The Bible is utilized in meaningful ways by teachers and children so that a child develops lifelong Bible skills.
- The message and content of the Bible is covered well during the session and over the course of childhood.
- Teachers and leaders are developing relationships in order to meet the child's ministry needs.
- Teachers/leaders are in groups small enough for children to talk and build relationships.
- The teaching environment is not cluttered or overly stimulating but provides ways for leaders to customize the space to support the focus of the session.

- Children are encouraged to participate rather than passively watch others.
- Methodology is contemporary to a child's world.
- Methodology is appropriate to the child's level of understanding.
- Methodology allows the child to be involved through a variety of teaching styles.
- Teaching aim and content is relevant and applicable to the child both in need and life experience.
- Teacher preparation is appropriate to the importance of teaching children the Bible.
- Leadership is consistent in order to encourage relationship development.
- Leadership is allowed to grow and develop according to their giftedness.
- Leadership is allowed to gain experiences in teaching and leading that facilitates ownership and a growing call to ministry.
- The long-term results of this model are beneficial to boys and girls becoming growing Christians.
- The model provides a connection to the home and supports parents as teachers.

Chapter 12



LEADING THE FORMATION OF YOUTH DISCIPLES

Dwayne C. Ulmer, Ed.D.

The Search for Christian Spirituality in America's Youth

The winds of change are in the air concerning the nature of youth ministry in the local church. The crest of the next wave is surging as many experts have come to the conclusion that if we continue to do youth ministry the way we have done youth ministry the last ten to fifteen years, there is a high probability we will, for the most part, miss reaching an American generation for Jesus Christ.

Without being too quick to dismiss the preceding paragraph as an overly paranoid alarm, consider the history of youth ministry over the last 175 years when the people group that came to be known as "adolescents" first began to emerge onto the American scene. Longtime youth ministry educator Mark Senter suggests, "the history of Protestant youth ministry in America is the story of a search for Christian spirituality in young people."[321] He goes on to say that Protestant youth groups, especially the most passionate youth of those groups, simply expected God to show up when they gathered together. The approaches of these groups varied at different times and in different contexts, but the underlying foundation was much the same: key youth expected to experience God during their teenage years.

Beginning shortly before the Civil War, faith communities throughout America sought to help sustain the presence of God in the lives of their youth. Youth ministry educator Richard Ross suggested that student ministry

began with a focus on the supremacy of Christ. He has also observed that spiritual awakenings happen when the Spirit of Christ saturates the church with the supremacy of Christ. Like several other youth ministry educators, Ross points out, “God often has allowed students to become the kindling for the fires of revival” down through the centuries.[322] Currently youth ministry, and the church as a whole, is in desperate need of spiritual awakening.

The Historical Emergence of Youth Culture

Near the beginning of the twentieth century, two books were published that stimulated an emerging people group that had yet to be defined. Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and Barrie’s *Peter Pan* ignited a new subculture that would eventually capture the hearts and minds and affect the spirituality of America’s youth. Stanley Hall, known as the father of adolescent psychology, was one of the first to call specific attention to an “in-between” people group that was emerging and caught between the child and the adult.[323] Others began to recognize the unique developmental issues that surfaced during the teenage years. With the rise of industrialization, many saw the need to design special laws that would address the developmental needs of these emerging adolescents. Hence the establishment of mandatory education laws, the juvenile justice system, and child labor laws helped protect these pre-adults from exposure to the harsh conditions of adult life.

The Eras of Youth Ministry

Historians have identified three distinct eras in youth ministry, each with its own unique characteristics that became obsolete as society evolved with the changing culture. The timeframe of these eras varies depending on the historian, but almost all agree that ministry to youth has taken place in three progressions, each new era cycling every forty to fifty years and each with different sociological methods but with the same end in mind: the spiritual formation of adolescents. The first of these progressions in youth ministry became known as The Era of Societies and Leagues (1880s–1930s). The second was the Era of Fellowships (1930s–1960s) born out of progressive education and reflecting the modern culture of the day. The third era is known as the Era of Youth Ministry (1960s–1990s). In this era the search for the presence of God drove many local congregations, and especially

parachurch organizations, to challenge students to follow the model of Jesus and His disciples and move toward daily practice of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) and the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37–4).

Since the transition into the twenty-first century, it has become apparent that a new era of student ministry is on the rise, or at least needs to be. Senter suggests that much like the transition years between the other eras, this new era has yet to define clearly the new struggle congregations are encountering as they seek to disciple their postmodern teenagers. Senter also says, "A pluralistic culture that values religious tolerance has made clarity elusive."[324] He goes on to say that the desire to experience God's presence continues among youth, and has possibly even intensified, as they gather in ministry settings. Clearly the times, they are a-changing although clear lines of change have yet to emerge. Student ministry leaders can no longer put new wine into the old wineskins.

Student ministry leaders can no longer put new wine into the old wineskins.

The Disappearance of the American Student from Local Churches

As this new era emerges, there is clear evidence that the twenty-first-century youth group is in trouble unless some things change. The first, and most alarming, of these indicators is the student retention rate in local churches. It is common knowledge that anywhere between 60-90% of students who were active in their youth ministry programs at one point will not be active as young adults. This means, depending on the researcher, that anywhere from six to nine out of ten teenagers are disappearing from the local church experience, a sociological concern that has become known as "graduating from God."

It is true that these numbers are hard to get at because of an "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" principle. Many youth ministries develop a picture of what they Student ministry leaders can no longer put new wine into old wineskins. think a fully discipled youth should look like upon graduation and then build a program to help develop that type of student. Upon seeing that youth walk across the stage at graduation, youth ministers, with a sigh, turn their attention to the next wave of students and quickly lose track of those who have gone before. So consequently, most youth ministers have

been unaware, until recently, that their youth needed to be discipled Christian young adults rather than discipled Christian teenagers.

The Rise of Biblical Illiteracy Among Christian Teenagers

In much the same way that postmodern public schools are dealing with the issue of illiteracy, the church has found itself dealing with biblical illiteracy. Allen Jackson, of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, has suggested that as many as 90% of our "Christian" teenagers are biblically illiterate.[325] This simply means that many of the students who are a part of the local church every week have an inadequate grasp of the Bible, the truth contained therein, and the significance and sequence of biblical events from Genesis to Revelation.[326]

Most of our Christian teenagers during their time in youth ministry have been overly exposed to topical Bible study, which is beneficial in order to address the felt needs of youth. But to limit teenagers' exposure to topical Bible study alone, throughout their youth ministry experience, is to limit the scope of their Bible study to those well-trafficked passages of Scripture. Consequently, there are large portions of Scripture teenagers never explore. This leaves students with a light grasp on a handful of Bible stories, the truth of which they may consider to be up for debate. Likely there are numerous teenagers graduating from their youth ministry programs believing that certain parts of the Bible simply do not apply to them. In addition, they are unable to speak of these large portions of unstudied segments of Scripture with any real knowledge or idea of how the entire Bible speaks to God's plan.

The Supremacy of Christ

Clearly, contemporary ministry to assist in the spiritual formation of teenagers is in serious need of an overhaul. "The root of Christian faith is relationship."[327] So it is at the point of teenagers' relationship with Christ that the overhaul must begin. Only through unconditional surrender to the supremacy of Christ will youth ministry be able to provide the framework that will make the difference. Most youth ministers share Richard Ross's belief that "Christian teenagers know and love Jesus." But Ross goes on to say that "most tend to know Him as a friend and not much more." Many

Christian “students may see Jesus as their little buddy who rides with them in their shirt pocket. He always is there in case they need to pull Him out to ‘poof’ some difficulty away. But the problem is students may believe He can be returned to their pocket—conveniently out of sight and out of mind until needed again.”[328] Such a view limits the power and presence of Christ in the lives of teenagers. When faced with the reality of difficult choices and hardships of faith, they tend to move forward on their own agendas, with total disregard of how Christ must live through them.

Youth ministers must begin to see the urgency of leading their teenagers into a spiritually awakened lifestyle that is guided by the parents of youth and molded by the supremacy of Christ in their lives. Ross has suggested youth ministers must:

1. lead students into an awakening to much more of who Christ is today—Hebrews 1:3;
2. lead students who increasingly embrace the supremacy (supreme power and authority) of Christ to worship and adore Him more deeply—Revelation 5:12;
3. lead students enthralled with the wonder of the King to respond to His majesty and lordship in all of life—Acts 2:36;
4. lead students to relate to the Son the way the Son relates to the Father—John 14:20, 23;
5. lead students to invite Christ to live out His life through them (and not live their lives for Him)—Galatians 2:20; and 6. lead students to join Christ in making disciples among all peoples—Matthew 28:19.[329]

One Central Concept

Before youth leaders can effectively contribute to the spiritual formation of their students, they must have a clear understanding of spiritual formation. “Spiritual Transformation is God’s work of changing a person into the likeness of Jesus by creating a new identity in Christ and by empowering a lifelong relationship of love, trust, and obedience to the glory of God.”[330] Some important aspects of this definition merit further attention. The first is that spiritual transformation is “God’s work.” This ought to ease the anxiety of youth leaders, knowing it is not all on them. It doesn’t matter how badly the adults who work with teenagers desire to inflict conviction on the teens

or force them in the right direction; ultimately it is God's work. The miracle of spiritual transformation is that God chooses, through His grace and mercy, to use inadequate and unworthy vessels like youth leaders who are willing and available to be used as His miraculous instruments of transformation in the lives o teenagers.

If youth ministers can teach their teenagers how to love God and others, remind them they must trust God no matter what the circumstances, and challenge them to be obedient all the time, they will have done their job well.

The second is that spiritual transformation is a process of "changing a person into the likeness of Christ" (from the inside out). The ultimate goal of all believers is to glorify God by becoming like Him. Spiritual transformation is the catalyst in this glorification process. The third aspect is that the process involves "creating a new identity in Christ." Anyone even remotely familiar with adolescent development understands that the number one struggle for teenagers is their search for identity. The amazing thing about youth ministry is that it provides the answer to the most pressing question youth are asking, "Who am I?" The fourth aspect is that spiritual transformation empowers "a lifelong relationship" with the Creator of the universe. Because the process is "lifelong," youth leaders need only assist the teenagers in developing and deepening that relationship with Christ for the short time the leaders are a part of the teenagers' lives. That relationship is built on three simple things: "love, trust, and obedience." If youth ministers can teach their teenagers how to love God and others, remind them they must trust God no matter what the circumstances, and challenge them to be obedient all the time, they will have done their job well.

The Biblical Foundation for Youth Discipleship

The first and most important institution God created was the family. Deuteronomy 6 describes God's original plan for the family. Parents are to be the primary ones responsible for the discipleship of their kids. Unfortunately, many well-meaning parents (maybe most of them) have abdicated to the church their role as that spiritual mentor. God never intended for the church to be responsible for the spiritual formation of teenagers. The biblical role of youth ministry, as well as the church, is to

come alongside parents as they lead in the spiritual formation of their children. For youth ministry to have an eternal impact, it is imperative for youth ministers to partner with the parents of their teenagers. It involves a strategic effort to equip parents to exercise their biblical role in the lives of their teenagers and enlisting them to be a part in every facet of youth ministry. It also involves being a resource for parents when it comes to understanding and caring for their youth, as well as ministering to the needs of the whole family.

In addition, the biblical foundation for youth ministry should be evident in other ways (Matt. 16:13-16). Most youth ministers recognize at least two biblical mandates that should be the foundation of their ministries. The first is the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20), and the second is the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37–40). The third is less obvious but should be called the Great Commitment (Acts 2:42–47). This passage paints the picture of a proper New Testament church culture. Note that the Acts passage suggests that God added to their number. The church began doing what the church was supposed to do, and God brought numerical growth. Often in youth ministry it is the other way around. Youth ministries try to grow their ministries numerically so they can do what they are supposed to do. A fourth biblical foundation is the Great Confession (Matt. 16:13–16). “The Christian life begins with a Great Confession, and the very bedrock of an effective student ministry is found in creating opportunities to confess His true identity for themselves,” according to Scott Stevens and Jeff Pratt.[331] This goes back to the urgency of helping teenagers surrender to the supremacy of Christ.

The Biblical Tasks of Youth Ministry

It is clear from these key biblical, foundational passages that there are five biblical tasks the church, in this case the youth ministry, should practice. Evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship are the keys to student ministry effectiveness. Much like the spokes of a wheel, these functions must be addressed with balance and urgency. In a postmodern society, these five tasks will likely look different than they did in a modern context decades ago. Soft convictions, pluralism, consumerism, relative truth, experience, tolerance, and relationships are important concepts in today’s postmodern culture, and teenagers have never known anything

different. The difficult task of “reculturing” student ministry is an ongoing necessity. “Reculturing” is a strategic and intentional process of change that involves concentrated critical assessment, passionate idea generation, implementation of new ideas and practices, and the ongoing evaluation of effectiveness of the changes implemented.”[332] It is a fluid context of change that allows youth ministry to address adequately the fast-moving condition of a postmodern youth culture.

A Foundational Discipleship Strategy That Engages Youth

Effective youth discipleship is dependent on a biblical foundation but also on a sound educational strategy. The institution of “Sunday School” has evolved over the last two centuries. Although the title “Sunday School” is antiquated, for the time being it seems to be a common starting point in most folks’ understanding of small group Bible study. “Sunday School is the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building on-mission Christians through open Bible study groups that engage people in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship.”[333]

As with the definition of “spiritual transformation,” it is important to unpack this definition in order to better understand the concept of a small group strategy. First take the word “foundational.” When something is foundational, it means that everything else is built on top of that foundation. If the foundation is secure, the structure will be strong. The second word, “strategy” implies there is a plan. It also hints that the strategy is twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, not just an event that happens once a week on Sunday morning. Although the Bible study event, which usually takes place on Sunday morning, is a critical element of the strategy, it is not the entire strategy.

There are two purposes of this foundational strategy. The first is for “leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Evangelism must be more intentional and obviously cannot be limited to a one-day-a-week Bible study. The makeup of most youth ministry Sunday morning Bible studies are teenagers who have grown up in church and are likely already professing believers. Therefore, it is imperative that ministry becomes more intentional in impacting the lost. Folsmbee suggests that student ministers equip and engage their students in “Life-Dynamic” faith sharing. He says this faith

sharing is authentic. “It is hide-nothing, tell-everything, and share-anything mindset that seeks to echo Christ’s life and shine some light into the darkness of our world.”[334] When Sunday Schools lose their evangelistic edge, they will struggle.

The second purpose of this foundational strategy is “for building on-mission Christians.” The strategy is designed to build believers into reproducing disciples. Often youth who are frustrated with the foundational study want to change the nature of the strategy. But the strategy calls for foundational Bible study. It never hurts to be exposed continually to foundational concepts of faith. No one ever gets so mature he or she can’t benefit from the repetition. That is why it is important to assign the maturing teenagers to a service task of some sort to help build them into “on-mission” Christians. The lost students need the on-mission students to be a part of the strategy in order to provide an influence on their spiritual journeys. For this reason, it is important to provide another, more in-depth, Bible study at another time where a higher accountability can be implemented for those students who are growing in their faith.

This other time would also include discipleship. “Discipleship is a lifelong journey of obedience to Christ that transforms a person’s values and behavior and results in ministry in one’s home, church, and the world.”[335] Discipleship is a lost art in postmodern society of quick fixes and impatience. Notice that the definition of discipleship includes the words “lifelong journey.” Big spiritual events like Disciple Now and other discipleship retreats or short-term studies can become significant springboards into ongoing discipleship, but they imply that the discipleship process is quick and relatively easy. The best kind of youth discipleship occurs when an older, more mature Christian takes teenagers under his or her wing and walks through life with them, teaching them, holding them accountable, praying with them, and challenging them over a long period of time. Folmsbee says, “It is not solely learning about God. It is about learning how to live one’s life glorifying God.”[336]

“Through open Bible study groups” is another critical element of the foundational strategy. Basically, there are two kinds of Bible studies necessary for churches to develop believers. One is a “closed” Bible study group. Closed Bible studies have parameters and are usually short-term studies with beginning and ending sessions. Each session usually builds on the previous sessions. Closed Bible studies involve a high accountability for

attendance and doing activities outside the session experience. They are designed with the spiritually growing believer in mind. Open Bible study groups are open to all persons, regardless of spiritual maturity. They are usually without an opening and closing session although they may have different units of study as a part of the ongoing Bible study plan. If students happen to miss a study, they will not be lost in the experience when they return. They have low accountability with a low expectation of work outside the sessions. They are also made up of foundational Bible study sessions. The danger in these two types of Bible studies is that a church may be trying to implement a closed Bible study in an open Bible study strategy or the other way around.

The Design of Open Bible Study Groups

Although it is true that "teens attract teens," the youth group is only going to retain students through intimate relationships. That means open Bible study groups must actually be small group experiences. For years sociologists have known that there are natural barriers to group size and relationships occurring at 30, 60, and 150 that arise from leadership opportunities, limits in social roles, and the capacity to maintain relationships. In addition, if groups are larger than ten to fifteen, it becomes difficult to design Bible study experiences that drill down far enough to address the specific individual needs of the students, maximize their participation, and enrich their relationships.

The old school of thought is that one adult teacher or volunteer should be responsible for no more than fifteen teenagers. Because of the postmodern challenges that tend to isolate teenagers from experienced adults who could have the most significant impact on their lives, many youth ministries are engaging more adults in the small group setting. There is evidence that tremendous spiritual and numerical growth in youth ministry occurs when the adult to student ratio is about one to four. This means that a class of fifteen enrolled teenagers (which will average about seven teenagers every week) will have about four adults.

The Why of Enrollment

The question is often asked, why is it important to enroll teenagers in small group Bible study? It used to be that Sunday School or small group Bible

study leaders would emphasize enrollment goals. Not much is said about that anymore, and many have come to wonder why enrollment is even an issue. When a person is invited to enroll in a small group Bible study and responds affirmatively, that person becomes a part of an intimate and narrowly defined ministry circle. Regardless of whether the individual ever attends Bible study, he or she still represents a warm heartbeat with ministry needs. If organized appropriately, this heartbeat will have a designated person to maintain contact and a ministry connection. It is important to remember that the Bible study time is only part of the foundational strategy.

It is not a statistic that is easy to explain, but Bible study groups tend to average about half of their enrollment. Likely it has something to do with group dynamics. Logic suggests that if a youth ministry small Bible study group would like to impact more teenagers, they would need to enroll more youth in their group. The average attendance will almost always grow with the enrollment. When the group gets to a size of no more than twenty enrolled, it is time to multiply that group into two groups in order to keep the group dynamics at an efficient level. Conversely, if the group is tempted to "purge" the enrollment (remove the names of members who have not been to Bible study in a designated length of time), it is likely the average attendance will eventually fall back to about 50%. In addition, there would then be a number of "purged" heartbeats that are no longer a part of a ministry circle.

As a rule, youth small groups should have at least one prospect for every teenager who is enrolled in Bible study. To qualify as a prospect, a teenager must not be active in another evangelical church and should have a point of contact: a phone number, e-mail, address or all of the above. This pool of teenage prospects becomes a specific target group for evangelism and ministry. When teenagers begin to pray specifically for the spiritual condition of other teenagers by name and seek opportunities to connect with them, the Holy Spirit does some pretty incredible things. When one of the prospects decides to enroll in the small group, then the teenagers in that small group will need to identify two more prospects to replace the one who enrolled.

The Organization of Small Groups

Ideally, teenagers who have moved into "on-mission" status in their spiritual growth should be enlisted and trained for a ministry role as a part of the small group. Although the names and job descriptions may vary, the youth

ministry is providing an opportunity for leadership. Some possible roles would be greeters; care group leaders (responsible for making frequent and consistent contacts and ministering to no more than three teenagers enrolled in the small group); class leaders (responsible for assisting the Bible study teacher or planning social activities beyond the Bible study experience); outreach leaders (responsible for maintaining the prospect list and tracking ministry to those prospects); secretaries (responsible for keeping records for the small group); and many other opportunities.

As far as the organization of these small groups is concerned, much is dependent on the size of the student ministry. Ideally, it is wise to separate the middle school from the high school if the numbers are permitting. Developmentally, the gap between older high schoolers and younger middle schoolers is too large. The transitional years (sixth grade, ninth grade, and twelfth grade) will likely require special attention. It is also wise to divide the small groups by gender, especially in the younger adolescent area. Small group classes should maintain an enrollment of no more than fifteen. When a group maxes out at fifteen, it should be multiplied into two groups. Small groups can be combined into large groups occasionally, but when the enrollment of the combined small groups exceeds about sixty, it is time to make the one large group into two large groups.

Emerging Practices

Mentoring. Many youth leaders recognize the urgency of connecting teenagers to caring adults from various generations. Richard Ross has suggested one-on-three discipleship to complement open Bible study groups. In this strategy, one adult is enlisted to disciple three teenagers. Preferably the adult enlisted will be the parent of one of the three students. This adult leader serves as a life-coach for the students. Ross suggests what the life-coach does is not as important as who the life-coach is. In addition, Ross suggests one older adult be enlisted and trained as a prayer mentor for each teenager. Their job, along with nurturing, is to pray over their students daily.[337]

Service learning. Since volunteerism is on the rise and the postmodern generation values experiential learning, many youth ministry programs are taking various aspects of their discipleship emphasis to the streets. Poverty, homelessness, orphans, the elderly, and social injustices are all hot interests

for teenagers who enjoy engaging in practical ministry. Rumor has it that youth camps are out and international mission trips are in. Teenagers seem more interested in investing in ministry rather than the traditional camp experience.

Family-based ministry. For some time now, youth ministries have been reorganizing around a family-based approach to ministry. This trend ranges anywhere from Mark DeVries's gradual replacement of youth-only ministry programs with family-inclusive programs to Voddie Baucham's approach to dissolve age-group ministry completely into the local church ministry. At any rate, churches are expressing more concern for the family context when it comes to ministry with and to teenagers. Many churches have also implemented a parent small group Bible study that parallels the open group Bible study in which their teenagers are engaged.

Strategic thinking. More and more youth leaders are in engaging in strategic thinking when it comes to Bible study curriculum and program themes. *The Simple Church* by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger has challenged churches to keep things simple. Organizations like LifeWay Christian Resources with their KNOWN strategy and Student Life with their online curriculum plan are leading the way for youth ministries to think strategically and simplify their miniseries.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the history of your youth discipleship program and how does it need to change?
2. How has your student ministry traditionally utilized open and closed Bible study groups?
3. What kind of strategy is the foundation for your student ministry?
4. What are some ways you can overcome some of the barriers to involving teenagers in intergenerational ministry?
5. How can youth ministries partner with parents and families of teenagers in order to keep the primary role of spiritual formation in the home?

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Chapter 13



LEADING THE FORMATION OF COLLEGIATE DISCIPLES

Dwayne C. Ulmer, Ed.D.

Christian history is rich with stories about how the prayers and availability of students have sparked great awakenings and revivals. One historian's research has shown that as many as twenty of the twenty-five historically documented revivals during the Second Great Awakening alone emphasized the role of youth in the movements.[338] Countless other revivals around the world were launched within the passionate hearts of students. In the early years of American Christianity, the soul of great universities engaged the heart of God. College and universities that currently stand as academic giants rooted in secularism were once beginning points for evangelical movements, spiritual transformation, and ministerial training. Universities such as Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Columbia were constituted as Christian-based educational institutions because the bright academic professors and administrators knew there were questions that could only be answered by bowing their heads in prayer to a higher intellect.[339]

As Sheppard mentions in his book *God on Campus*, the original condition of college campuses and the characteristics of college students have changed.

> The early stories of Harvard, William & Mary, Yale and Princeton—and, of course, the pioneering narratives of so many other colleges and universities that followed in their wake—help us remember the

surprising history of holy rebellion out of which our campuses originally emerged. Contrary to the modern trend of pitting faith and scholarship against one another, the extraordinary spiritual legacy these earliest campuses extend to us is the essential knowledge that God and academia are by no means, mutually exclusive.[340]

The Black Hole of Collegiate Spirituality

Over the last few years, many Christian leaders and educators have come to see the collegiate age group as a "giant spiritual black hole." As evidence continues to mount suggesting teenagers are "graduating from God" and leaving the church, the spiritual passion that was once such a major part of the college campus life has all but disappeared. Of an even greater concern is the struggle local churches are experiencing to equip and motivate college students for the evangelism and discipleship of their generation. In addition, the local church seems to be unconcerned about the growing generational gap in their congregations, the number of college-age adults desperately trying to figure out life without connections to mature Christian believers, the limitation of significant college ministry resources, and the lack of biblical leaders who have a passion for college students and their discipleship.

The Issues at the Forefront

"A broad survey of the most pressing issues in college ministry appears to center around three areas: 1) The developmental issues inherent in the age group; 2) The cultural conditions in which college students are living; and 3) The generation's view of the church as an entity," as Jim Graham, adjunct student ministry professor at Dallas Baptist University has observed.[341] To these three variables, add the lack of investment in local church college ministries and it is not difficult to see that college students are in desperate need of attention from the local church.

Unfortunately, because most college students are inconsistent in church attendance and are not able to contribute much to a church's financial resources, many church leaders have allowed the ministry to college students to lapse in favor of other age-group ministries. The pastor of a Baptist megachurch in the Dallas/Fort Worth area recently said, "We can't afford to

invest a significant amount of resources in a college ministry because we will only receive a limited return on our investment. It doesn't make sense to put a lot of our eggs into this basket of ministry, especially since college students won't significantly impact our church growth in the same way other ministries do."

Ironically, many churches are sinking significant dollars and resources in high-end youth ministry programs in order to help their teenagers become "good Christian teenagers." They then send them into the collegiate arena without having properly equipped them to be "good Christian young adults." After watching their students walk across the high school graduation stage, many youth ministers breathe a sigh of relief and then turn their attention to the incoming crop of new middle schoolers. Unfortunately, when these high school graduates go away to college, the "out-of-sight-out-of-mind" principle applies. Because the local church doesn't see the students, it tends to forget about them or assume they are plugged into churches near their campuses.

Developmental Issues that Scream to be Addressed

Successful ministry to college students must begin with an understanding of the key developmental issues students are experiencing at this significant time in their lives. Many, if not most, of life's important decisions will be made during the college years. Decisions relating to career, lifelong relationships (including marriage), worldview formation, and spiritual orientations form the foundation from which all other major directions in human life will be expressed. As a collegiate ministry consultant states,

> The years between 18 and 25 mark the stage of life when people are transitioning from childlike dependency into mature independence. They have a foot in both camps but no solid grounding in either one. They're truly in between. College-age ministry fills a need in the lives of young people by walking them through the maturing process with love, care, understanding, and patience.[342]

In the area of psychological development, Erik Erikson suggested that the college-age person is closing out the identity formation process.[343] Throughout their middle school and high school years, these young adults have been wrestling with who they are and where they fit in the world around them. Suddenly, their path to identity achieved is interrupted, and they find themselves in a completely new context, with new challenges, opportunities, and social and academic environments, away from most of the friends with whom they have grown up and possibly outside the protective environment of family for the first time. Many college students subconsciously take a step back in their identity formation and have to restart the development of their own value system and the discovery of their own individuality, taking their new context into account. According to collegiate ministry consultant Chuck Bomar, the identity formation isn't just a big issue for this age group, it is *the* issue. "This search for identity is so all-consuming that it greatly impacts the way a young person understands the Word (Scripture). It influences whether or not they'll take their faith seriously in the future." He goes on to say, "We can't effectively minister to college-age people if we don't meet them in the middle of their most profoundly life-changing experience."[344]

In connecting identity formation to spiritual development, Bomar identifies five spiritually-based stages in identity formation. These stages can help college ministers diagnose the condition of college students so they can more effectively minister to them.

Substitute. "It made sense at the time"—The Substitute is extremely influenced by peer pressure and inconsistent behavior. He or she makes decisions in order to fit into a social environment without really considering or understanding the consequences of those choices.

Floater. "I'm just waiting to see what happens"—The Floater seems to wander aimlessly through the college age years without any direction in life. He or she may roam from part-time job to part-time job or change his or her major frequently during the college experience. Floaters tend to live from day to day and put very little thought into what comes next or seek a place to fit.

Explorer. "I want to keep trying different things"—The Explorer is the opposite of the Substitute. The Substitute commits without exploring while the Explorer explores without committing. Explorers formulate an identity

based on relationships, school, and work while putting more thought in values, attitudes of people, and the long-term duties of employment.

Tentmaker. "This is what I have always wanted to do"—The Tentmaker has reached a point of balance between the exploration and commitment. Tentmakers have been through significant experiences and along with increasing self-awareness have the ability to make concrete decisions about who they are.

Theologian. "I am a child of God"—The Theologian has a fixed identity as well as intimate knowledge of God. In addition, the Theologian seeks to honor Him with his or her life. Theologians have an identity that is grounded in God and want their faith to define their sociological pursuits, relationships, jobs, and circumstances.[345]

Once identity is achieved, the next major social issue facing college students is what Erikson called intimacy vs. isolation. In order to establish intimacy, college students, who are still in the process of establishing their individuation, now make further adjustments to complement another person who is also establishing his or her individuation. "Intimacy is knowing a person deeply and allowing that person to know you in the same way. It's the ability to be close, loving, and honest with another person. And it develops through time, communication, trust, and vulnerability. Intimacy demands a certain level of identity development so we can disclose who we are to another person."[346] Obviously college students are able to experience intimacy before their identity is achieved. In fact, the pursuit of intimacy can be a huge part of a person's identity development. However, if that identity is significantly underdeveloped, an intimate relationship has the potential to do significant damage to those involved. College students don't need large gatherings or huge events but mature people they can trust who love and understand them, love and understand God, and who are willing to take the time to invest in them as they negotiate the maze of intimacy in their lives.

Cognitively, the young adult brain is still in a dynamic time of growth. Younger adolescents make the transition from the limited ability to think in concrete terms to the broader ability to think abstractly. Although realization of this transition has been gradual through their teenage years, abstract thinking is at full throttle by the time they are college students. Two new thinking skills, according to Piaget, support the capacity for formal operations. One of them is the ability to create a hypothetical framework, in which both realistic and potential solutions to problems may be considered.

The second is propositional thinking, in which values are assigned to various possibilities. Recent research has concluded that the prefrontal cortex, an area that lies at the very front of the brain behind the forehead, is one of the last areas of the brain to develop. The prefrontal cortex is the area of the brain responsible for executive functions such as decision making, evaluating, and planning—the area that helps students make good judgments.[347] The orbitofrontal cortex, the lower portion of the prefrontal cortex responsible for calculating risk, is the last area to develop, which may not happen until the early twenties according to UCLA neuroscientist Adriana Galvan. Until this part of the brain fully matures, risk assessment requires more time and effort in decision making.[348]

Sometime during these years, no matter what the person's religious background, college students come to a realization that they have accepted a belief system that was handed down to them. It is during the college years that college ministers can help students make the transition from holding an un-Christian worldview to becoming mature individuals who think biblically and view the world through biblical lenses. Because, possibly for the first time, they will encounter people who think differently than they do, it is likely they will experience three roadblocks that will hinder their biblical worldview development: science, philosophy, and religion. Therefore it is imperative for college ministers to help students learn how to dismantle common Western worldviews that suggest science has all the answers and instead teach biblical theology, explain faith-based science, point out that all truth is God's truth (no matter how it was discovered), properly define philosophy without dismissing it, point people to Scripture all the time, know the basics of faith-based Christianity, hold firmly to personal convictions, and teach the historical roots of Christianity.[349]

The Young Adult Cultural Soup of Postmodernism

"The certainty with which we can predict human development provides a steady tempo on which we may minister. Cultural influences, on the other hand, are like instrumentalists in a jazz band whose interplay brings creativity and constant change," according to Graham. "As each aspect of the culture plays its part, it inspires and colors other elements. Ministry in the context of culture is less about consistent content and more about improvisation adjustment to changing needs."[350] Something about the

culture began to change during the 1960s. “The worldview known as postmodernism began to emerge on the cultural landscape,” according to Walt Mueller, an expert youth cultural analyst. “Rooted in the belief that there is no such thing as objective and transcendent truth, the postmodern way of thinking and living allows people to discover and invent truth for themselves.”[351] Postmodernism has since become the underlying foundation of the culture in which college students have grown up. The influence of postmodernism on students cannot be overstated. It is all consuming. Ironically, very few young adults, if any, will have consciously adopted a postmodern view of living and thinking. “Most have assimilated it without thought or critique simply because it’s part of the cultural soup they’ve been marinating in for so long,” observes Mueller.[352]

In a postmodern culture, everything that has meaning or value is subjective and colored by the perspective of the individual. An in-depth discussion of postmodernism is not possible in this context, but it is important to know four marks of postmodernism:

Moral relativism. This mark is the assertion that what is moral is dictated by a particular situation in light of a particular culture or social location. Moral values become a matter of personal opinion or private judgment rather than something grounded in objective truth.

Autonomous individualism. This idea maintains that each person is independent in terms of destiny and accountability. Ultimate moral authority is self-generated.

Narcissistic hedonism. Narcissism signifies a preoccupation with self. Hedonism is the love of pleasure. The value of narcissistic hedonism is the classic “I, me, mine” mentality that places personal pleasure and fulfillment at the forefront of concerns.

Reductive naturalism. This mark proposes that nature is “all that is.” It holds that all that can be known within nature is that which can be empirically verified. What is real is only that which can be seen, tasted, heard, smelled, or touched.[353]

Having a good grasp of the postmodern “cultural soup” in which college students live will enable the college minister to discover appropriate angles of ministry. Walt Mueller, in his book, *Engaging the Soul of the Teenager,* suggests these tips:

- Approach ministry as a cross-cultural missions venture.

- Be in but not of the world.
- Always evaluate (and where necessary abandon) methods.
- Answer all the groans.
- Use popular culture as a communication tool.
- Understand your own cultural biases.
- Be intent on building relationships.
- Love without condition or limits.
- Be willing to suffer "with."
- Serve with vulnerable humility.
- Provide a place and community.
  - The larger body of Christ must include emerging generations as it assembles for worship, mission, fellowship, education, and service.
  - Focus on intimate community in small groups.
- Be a learning listener.
- Be a storyteller.
- Be a person of grace.[354]

How Young Adults View the Church

This emerging generation of adults has a non-traditional view of the church. Though there are likely a number of issues connected with the disappearance of college-age adults from local churches, George Barna has identified six, as reported by young adults themselves

- Nearly one-fourth of the eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds interviewed said churches appear to be overprotective. "Christians demonize everything outside the church" most of the time. In addition another 22% also said the church ignores real-world problems while a similar number said their church was too concerned about the negative impact of movies, music, and video games.
- One-third of the young adults surveyed said they feel their church is shallow; another third feel their church is boring and that God appears to be missing from their experience of church.
- Many of the young adults said they do not like the way churches appear to be against science. Over one-third of those interviewed said, "Christians are too confident they know all the answers," and another 25% said, "Christianity is anti-science."

- Many of the young adults said they feel churches are too simple or too judgmental when it comes to issues of sexuality. Seventeen percent said "they've made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them."
- Almost 30% of the young adults said, "churches are afraid of the beliefs of other faiths," and they struggle with the exclusivity of Christianity. Many suggested they feel like they have to choose between their friends and their faith.
- The last reason many young adults say they have left the church is because it is "unfriendly to those who doubt." Over 30% said they feel like they can't ask life's most pressing questions," and another 23% they had "significant intellectual doubts" about their faith.[355]

Although most Christians would agree that the church is the people and not the building, there is some question, especially among college students, whether ministries actually reflect this belief. The purpose of the church is to equip believers of all ages at their developmental levels to imitate God in every way, enable them to play a part in the plan God has of advancing the kingdom of God on Earth, and assisting them in finding reconciliation with God and others. Most church leaders get frustrated with the consumer mentality clearly evident in churches, but the fact remains that they helped create it. When most people talk about their churches, they talk about the programs they offer and the activities they provide. The underlying message is that churches have a product to promote. When church is defined by the programs it offers, it means little more than moving from one event to the next, promoting from one room to another. College students need and want so much more from their church. They want to be a part of something meaningful and significant, something real and eternal. The bottom line is that church should be about relationships.[356]

The bottom line is that church should be about relationships.

Implementing Effective Ministry Practice

Quality leadership. Successful collegiate ministry is dependent on enlisting and equipping effective leaders. There are several characteristics that are important for college ministry leaders or volunteers to have if they are to lead effective college ministries. The first, and likely the most important, is they must love college students and have a clear passion to reach, assimilate,

equip, and direct them into God's service for the kingdom. The problem with many local churches is that they don't know what to do about college ministries. To be sure, college ministry is a niche ministry, much like ministry to sixth graders or even ninth graders. The college years are transition times in life that require unique attention. Many collegiate ministries fall under an adult minister's supervisory umbrella where multiple adult age groups demand a great deal of attention. College students are not like young professionals or young marrieds. Very few college-age ministries thrive under these conditions unless there are leaders who feel a specific call and passion to serve college-age people. On the other hand, it is also not wise to place the collegiate ministry under the leadership of an overextended youth minister who does not have the time to give the same level of energy he or she gives to a high-end student ministry. College students are also different from secondary education students. Unless there are passionate and trained collegiate leaders, the priority of college ministry will suffer by comparison.

Several key principles are important for college leaders to have if they are to be effective in ministry to this age group. Bomar lists a few:

- They must be people driven, not program driven. The "program-driven way of thinking is repulsive to college-age people who are hungry for authenticity and honesty."
- They must not let structure get in the way of relationships. The idea is not to create events to cultivate relationships but cultivate relationships that create events.
- They must be prepared to handle major theological discussions. College students are often extremely interested in more complex issues of theology and are often anxious to take their newfound critical thinking skills out for a spin.
- They must know how to counsel people in pain. The college-age years are full of painful experiences—issues that relate to identity, intimacy, meaning, pleasure, and truth. These issues tend to create a great deal of internal pain and confusion.
- They must learn how to be honest even when it hurts. College students appreciate honesty and transparency even to the point of bluntness.
- They must work with older adults. A missing ingredient in many college ministries is the invaluable intergenerational connection. Older

adults bring an abundance of experience and wisdom to the relationship table with college students whose biggest deficiency is experience.
- They must understand and work with the church structure. If college ministry does not work within the frameworks of church structure, it will run into ideological and financial roadblocks.[357]

Discipleship. The major missing ingredient in college ministry (and in reality, church-wide ministry) is the practice of discipleship. It is interesting that one of the main principles of ministry practice that Jesus demonstrated during His life was the long-term, almost exclusive, equipping of His followers. Yet one of the most neglected areas of ministry practice in the local church today is the practice of discipleship. Consider this definition of discipleship: "Discipleship is a lifelong journey of obedience to Christ that transforms a person's values and behavior and results in ministry in one's home, church, and the world." The key words to the definition are "a lifelong journey of obedience" not a series of events. There is nothing quick or immediate about this process. Discipleship, as Jesus did it, was within a small group context, highly relational, and involved walking through life with His disciples as He poured His heart into their hearts, and exemplified a life of faith through His obedience. Discipleship in its purest form is equipping people to follow God, not so much teaching people about God. Teaching the facts about faith is important, but college students are not interested in more information; they want to deal with deeper issues of life.

Discipleship in its purest form is equipping people to follow God, not so much teaching people about God.

There are at least five prerequisites for building discipleship according to long-time college minister Steve Shadrach: 1) Follow up is essential. The first twenty-four hours of a new believer's life are critical. To delay follow-up puts them at risk of becoming spiritual orphans. 2) Each individual has infinite worth. "Whatever level of commitment and character they observe in the first three, six, or nine months is what they come to believe the Christian life is." Each new believer is now precious cargo that needs careful attention because one never knows the potential of one life. 3) Major in building on the basics. It is the simple spiritual habits that build long-term character traits. 4) Use groups to help establish believers. Large groups are important, but small groups (groups of four to six) are the backbone of ministry. And 5)

disciples are made not born. A disciple's heart is based on a person's passion to study Scripture, to put God's truth into practice, and to teach the word to others.[358]

Building community. Since college students tend to emphasize social connections, college ministry must provide time for building friendships. A simple meet and greet time built into a gathering experience doesn't do it for this people group. They need to have open-ended opportunities to develop lasting friendships, engage in deeper conversations, and connect at deeper levels with others. They are desperate for the kind of intense fellowship described in Acts 2:43—47. Corporate worship can be invaluable in building community, but it must be more about celebrating God's presence and the relationships in life than about the music, "the talk," or the offering.

Assimilation. Many parachurch organizations are doing a decent job of ministry to students on local college and university campuses. But parachurch organizations are by design just that, *para* (meaning *to come alongside of)* church. College ministry is incomplete if it does not assimilate the people into the Bride of Christ, which is the church. The problem is that most churches attempt to assimilate college-age people into their churches by drawing them into another event designed for them or getting them to come to a church service. "The goal of assimilation is to have college-age people become fully integrated into adult relationships apart from the church service or organized events."[359] "Y'all come" attitudes are old-school. Such attitudes create a barrier between them and us that should not exist. Old-school thinking tries to get those over there to come over here. Reality calls for us to be *over there in their midst,* walking with them through life as they move toward assimilation.

Emerging Practices

Mentoring. Mentoring has taken on a renewed significance in the ministry to college-age people. There is value in pairing up college students with older adults for long-term relationships that involve simply living life with one another. The content of the time shared is not nearly as important as the fellowship and accountability of being together. Many churches are finding great value in allowing senior adults to "adopt" college students during their tenure at college. This provides a natural mentoring ground as well as a spiritual family away from home.

Ministry teams. Service learning is a hot topic in colleges and universities today. In fact, many high schools and universities are now requiring their students to participate in service projects beyond the walls of their schools in order to graduate. College students love to volunteer and plug into ministry and mission service opportunities. Many college ministries are identifying various ministry opportunities in the communities around their local church for college students to find practical application to biblical servanthood.

Designated leadership. More and more churches these days are recognizing the need to enlist and equip a person to give leadership to the college-age people group of their churches, even though the number of college students within the church's circle of ministry may be limited. This may be a paid or unpaid position, but the reality is that many local congregations recognize the urgent need to minister to this age group. Richard Ross has suggested that in many cases it might be wise to extend the job description of the youth minister to be responsible "for guiding the church's relational ministry to and with students for up to one year after high school graduation."[360] This might help ease the students' transition from youth ministry to college life and certainly address the "out-of-sight-out-of-mind principle" by which the church loses touch with college students who go off to school.

Discussion Questions

1. Define the current state of college ministry in your church.
2. What would you think college-age adults would say about your church?
3. What kind of evidence of postmodern thought do you see in college students?
4. How can your church implement key strategies for reaching the transitional college-age people group?
5. Who can you identify that has graduated from high school over the last few years who may not be involved with a local church? What are some things you can do about it?
6. What are some missing ingredients of your college ministry?

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Chapter 14



LEADING THE FORMATION OF YOUNG MARRIED ADULT DISCIPLES

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In the midst of the various laws and instructions given by Moses to Israel prior to crossing over into the Promised Land, one finds an interesting law related to marriage: “When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken” (Deuteronomy 24:5, NASB). The beginning of marriage was so important that an Israelite man was excused even from the all-important responsibility of military service for a period of time in order to get his marriage off to a good beginning.

This verse seems to suggest the idea of *trajectory:* if something begins down a good pathway, there is a better chance of it remaining on that good pathway. Specifically, if a couple can begin marriage in a good, healthy, and productive fashion, it bodes well for the years of marriage yet to come. It is interesting to note that this particular injunction for beginning marriage in a positive manner follows a passage on divorce and seems to be placed in contrast to instructions regarding the breakup of a marital union.

Ministry to young married couples is also about trajectory—marriage trajectory, spiritual trajectory, and life trajectory. If those in ministry to this age group can help shape the early part of marriage and of spiritual life for young adults, it will benefit each marriage partner, the couple, their children, and all those who are a part of the couple’s world in the days ahead.

> If something begins down a good pathway, there is a better chance of it remaining on that good pathway.

The ages of "young married" generally encompass those eighteen to thirty-five, although it has been assumed that by the age of thirty-five that couples are moving into new stages of life, such as parenting and settling down in their vocations. Due to the later ages of marriage in recent years, young couples may already be settled in their careers rather than settling down together. So the characteristics of young married adults will vary with age and experience. However, all young married adults benefit from ministry that assists them in starting down the good pathway and learning how to remain on it.

This chapter will address the unique characteristics of young married adults, their changing attitudes and experiences, the developmental tasks of this group, and the cultural influences that will impact their experiences in the church. Suggestions for ministering to young married adults will be provided as well.

Demographics

In developing, expanding, or refining a church's ministry to young married adults, it is essential for ministry leaders to know basic demographic information about this particular group. This includes information about marriage, having children, and divorce.

Most Americans, Christian or not, believe that being married is important. According to the 2010 *State of our Unions* report, "more than 75 percent of Americans believe that 'being married' is an important value, with little variation by class."[361] Thus, not only do adults see marriage as important, but most adults marry. According to George Barna, 78% of adults in the United States have been married at least once. Further, the rate is even higher among Christians, where 84% marry.[362]

While most adults marry, they are increasingly older when they do so. Every decade for the past fifty years, the median age of first marriage for both males and females has increased. In 2011 this figure stood at 28.7 years for males and 26.5 years for females.[363] Since 2000, the median age of first marriage has increased about two years for males and 1.5 years for females. Correspondingly, the age of the birth of a first child has increased for women

in the past four decades, including an eight-fold increase in the birthrate of women over thirty-five between 1970 and 2006.[364]

Almost half of all married couples involve both spouses being employed. Both the husband and wife were employed in 47.8% of married-couple families in 2010, a slight decrease from the previous year.[365] Women are also working longer into pregnancy and returning to work sooner after the birth of a child.[366] Although most individuals see marriage as important, having a good marriage is not always easy. According to Barna, among adults who have been married, about one-third (33%) have experienced a divorce. Born-again Christians are divorcing at about the same rate, although the rate of divorce among those who identify themselves as Evangelical Christians is 26%.[367] The well-respected *State of Our Unions* report asserts the following: "Overall, the chances remain very high—between 40 and 50 percent—that a first marriage started in recent years will end in either divorce or separation before one partner dies."[368] While this particular statistic is predictive rather than actual, it demonstrates the realities facing any couple who desires to have a good marriage.

The early part of marriage can be particularly challenging for couples. First marriages that end in divorce last a median of eight years, with couples often separating seven years into the marriage.[369] It is not difficult to extrapolate that the problems that lead a couple to separate or divorce begin long before the actual marital dissolution occurs, even back to the earliest part of marriage. What are the adjustments that married couples must make?

Developmental Tasks in Early Marriage

Adjusting to life together is essential to a couple's success in marriage. Goldenberg and Goldenberg identify several key tasks necessary for couples to proceed in a healthy developmental manner throughout the early part of marriage. These are:

- Forming a new marital system
- Realigning relationships with extended families and friends to include one's spouse
- Adjusting the marital system to make space for children
- Joining in accomplishing child-rearing, financial, and household tasks
- Realigning relationships with extended family to include grandparenting roles[370]

Other key tasks include the overall process of adjusting to each other, developing a shared spiritual journey, making decisions about jobs and where to live, developing parental roles, and introducing children to various institutions such as church, school, and various activity groups.

A noteworthy study out of Creighton University on the first five years of marriage identified three key issues in early marriage: time, sex, and money.[371] These three issues were reported as problematic most often, as well as most intensely, by couples in their study. First, "the number one issue that newly married respondents reported as problematic at some point in their marriage was balancing job and family."[372] In addition, the second most problematic issue was the "frequency of sexual relations," and the third, fourth, and fifth most problematic issues were "financial, debt brought into the marriage, husband's employment, and financial situations."[373] An awareness of these expressed issues of newly married couples provides information for churches who wish to truly minister to the needs of this group of adults.

Many churches are developing and continuing effective ways to guide young adults through these developmental tasks and to help them settle into a new marriage. However, marriage itself is not the only aspect of their lives that is changing and challenging. Young adults are sorting through other challenges associated with experience, life stressors, technology, and cultural influences.

Challenges of Working with Young Married Adults

Working with young married couples in ministry settings can be extremely rewarding. Most often, these individuals are energetic, enthusiastic, and willing to learn. They are often hungry for real, tangible examples of vibrant Christianity and of healthy marriage. Many young couples will take risks to move beyond their comfort levels in ministry or mission activities. Yet while there are positives of involvement with young married adults, there are also challenges associated with ministering to this particular group of adults.

One such challenge is *the wide range of ages and experiences* of those who make up the group. A young married ministry may include couples who are not yet old enough to vote, alongside individuals well into their thirties. This has become even more likely as folks wait longer to get married. Young married couples may also have a great deal of variability in education levels

and in their involvement in careers. Some will also have one or more children, while others choose not to have children or to delay childbearing. Variations can also occur in number of marriages. While most individuals will be in their first marriage, most ministries to young married couples will include some individuals in a second or later marriage. Recognizing these variations will be important for preparation of materials and even for choosing the types of models and mentors you use in the ministry.

A second challenge to working with young married adults is *the mobility of couples in this life stage*. Especially prior to having children, many young couples are extremely mobile. One teacher of young adults stated, "We have a completely different class each week." Visits to friends, relatives, or a spur-of-the-moment trip out of town can impact the consistency of working with this group. In addition, young adults also tend to be fluid in how they schedule their lives. Often, they will be slow to commit to church-related activities or projects, creating frustration for those in church leadership. Some will, at times, appear to be "monitoring their options," and only agreeing to attend an activity at the last moment, if nothing more tantalizing presents itself.

Yet another challenge for those working with young married couples is *recognizing the specific stressors faced by these individuals*. In report after report, young married couples cite one of their biggest struggles as facing and coping with the stressors that are a part of young adult life. One or both spouses may be attempting to finish a college or graduate degree; some are just entering a career. Some are on the lower rungs of the totem pole in their workplace or career field, creating frequent work-related demands. In addition, young adults deal with numerous financial stressors. Decisions to begin having children or to add children to the family can create difficulties, especially in cases of unexpected pregnancy, difficulty conceiving, or loss of a pregnancy. The fast pace of life often strains marriage and can thus make the spiritual formation process more difficult.

As leaders relate to young married adults, another challenge for consideration is their *comfort with the technological world.* Young couples may not bring printed Bibles but may look up verses on smartphones or other electronic devices. Home telephones are replaced by cell phones, and e-mail is seen as slow and outdated. Many prefer to communicate by text or by other chosen social media. Being aware of the level of technological comfort and savvy of this group and being willing to keep pace is certainly a

challenge for workers, but it is also an essential part of linking with the world of young adults.

Perhaps one of the more difficult challenges may be related to *lifestyle issues* of some young couples. Cohabitation, or individuals of the opposite sex living together outside of marriage, has increased rapidly in the past five decades. In the U.S., since 1970, the number of Americans living together outside of marriage has increased more than 1,000%. These couples made up about 10% of all couples in 2008.[374] While a discussion of reasons for this trend and the threats that this presents for young married adults are not the focus of this chapter, one must consider how this will be addressed in the church. Some who choose to attend newlywed classes or other young adult classes may already be living together. Staff members must develop theological clarity and practical guidelines for dealing with this challenge.

Goals for Ministry

In ministry, it is helpful to consider the desired outcomes of ministry efforts. If we are to help set a trajectory for young married couples, where are we aiming?

The first and most important goal is to *assist young married adults to become devoted followers of Christ.* This may involve introducing them to a personal relationship with Christ and helping them become committed followers of Christ. For those who are already believers, ministry should focus on helping them grow and mature in that relationship. For all individuals, spiritual formation is centered in young adults learning and growing in their relationships with God and in knowing and understanding the Bible.

A second goal closely correlated to the first is helping *young couples apply what they are learning from the Bible to situations in daily life.* It is a danger for believers to have knowledge about what the Bible says but then live a life that is inconsistent with biblical teaching. Helping couples apply the Bible's lessons to their work world, their friendships and relationships, and to their home life is a crucial ministry task.

Last, ministry to young adults should be rooted in *providing help and support to these individuals as they go through the transitions of early adulthood and marriage and as they deal with the pressures and demands of life.* Ministry to young couples should assist them in navigating engagement,

the newness of a beginning marriage, and the blessing of new additions to their family. Teachers and mentors should walk beside them when they gain a job, lose a job, buy a house, deal with a family crisis, struggle with finances, or experience marriage conflict. As couples go through these experiences, we can help them to interpret these events against the backdrop of God's care, provision, and God's desired plan for their lives.

When a ministry to young adults has clearly identified goals, there is a better likelihood of moving couples along the pathway toward these goals. Some examples of how churches are ministering to young married adults might be helpful.

Ministry with Young Married Adults

Many churches attempt to reach out to young married adults and help them in the process of marital adjustment and growth. Most churches offer at least a Bible study opportunity for young married adults, although the focus and age span of these classes vary.

Recognition of the opportunity to reach out to those who are preparing for marriage and are newly married can provide a significant help to these couples. For example, First Baptist Church in Lewisville, Texas, offers a "marriage countdown" class that is an eight-week marriage preparation class. They partner with a program called "Twogether in Texas,"[375] which focuses on communication and conflict management skills, and as a result, couples receive their marriage licenses for a reduced rate. Once these classes are completed (often by those who have no connection to the church), if a core group desires, the church begins a newlywed class. Otherwise, interested couples are integrated into the young adult classes that already exist.[376]

At Travis Avenue Baptist in Fort Worth, Texas, young couples can attend a small group class comprised of engaged couples and couples in the first eighteen months of marriage. Couples go through a year-long curriculum, the first half of which considers the marriages of various Bible couples. This study deals with good examples of marriage, such as Ruth and Boaz and also Elizabeth and Zechariah, as well as negative examples of marriage, such as Ahab and Jezebel.

In the second half of the year, the class focuses on topical issues related to developing strong marriages, including communication, conflict, finances,

dealing with parents and in-laws, spiritual intimacy, and sexual intimacy. Leaders work with college and singles departments in the church to invite those who are engaged to come to the class. Twice a year, a focused engaged couples class meets for three weeks to deal with issues related to preparing for marriage. On a few occasions, the newlywed class leaders have rented a booth at a large bridal fair to promote the engaged couples' class. When couples finish their year in the newlywed class, leaders help them move to one of the young adult Sunday School classes in the next department.

The newlywed class is designed to reach out to those who have not grown up in or attended church regularly, as well as to long-time church participants. Focus is placed on facilitating couples in developing friendships with other couples and on spouses being involved together in ministry and mission activities. The overall goal of the class is to help couples in the early part of marriage to learn to be intentional about the ongoing care and nurture of the marriage relationship.

A smaller congregation in East Tennessee has an on-going young married adult class. Called the FLAME (Family Life and Marriage Enrichment) class, the young married adults (newly married and married with young children) meet on Sunday mornings, but they also spend time together outside of class. The curriculum for this class is need-based, focused on issues the couples express interest in studying. One of the approaches they use is to invite "mentors" into the class, not as teachers but just as role models who interact with the young couples. Many churches use this informal approach to expose the young couples to those who have weathered the storms and emerged with strong marriages.

In evaluating and setting goals for their ministries, the staff at Little Rock's First Baptist Church decided that because of the press of time for adults, they needed to focus their ministry to young married couples on weekend activities. They observed that most young couples, particularly those with dual careers and children, must be ministered to when they are on the church campus. Jonathan Curtis, teaching pastor, states, "They wanted to be 'taught' something of depth and substance but were unable to give the time in which our structure demanded."[377] Other ministries may grow out of Sunday Bible study and worship, but providing teaching and training when they are available is critical.

Sample Topical Resources for Young Married Adult Classes

- *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman (LifeWay)
- *Before You Say "I Do"* by H. Norman Wright and Wes Roberts (LifeWay)
- *Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* by Gary Thomas (Zondervan and LifeWay)
- *Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before—and After—You Marry* by Les and Leslie Parrott (Zondervan)
- *Boundaries in Marriage: An 8-Session Focus on Understanding the Boundaries That Make or Break a Marriage* by Henry Cloud and John Townsend (Zondervan)
- *Love and War: Finding the Marriage You've Dreamed Of* by John and Stasi Eldridge
- *The Meaning of Marriage* by Timothy and Kathy Keller (LifeWay)

Jonathan preaches during the service for young married adults. He states, "Issues of discipleship can be found in every teaching. Topics usually reserved for a small group setting are being brought into the sanctuary." In addition, they have chosen to include more technology in the ministry, capitalizing on the technological savvy and interest of this younger group. The young married adults have responded positively to using text responses during the service. Jonathan indicates that "Before I sit down, I will have sixty to ninety responses. Many of these responses open up to more meaningful discipleship opportunities."

Other pastors and educators consulted about ministry to young married adults echoed the same sentiment that young married adults are stretched too thin and the balance of marriage and family is a constant challenge for the couples as well as for the church. Determining effective ways to reach and provide spiritual formation for this age group must include considering the time crunch they continually feel as well as their growing need for ministries for their children. It is important to choose curriculum that is theologically sound, leads to spiritual growth, and addresses their perceived needs.

Several evangelical publishers provide short-term curriculum resources with the purpose of strengthening marriage. Zondervan Publishing and LifeWay Resources produce topical curriculum, either printed resources or video-driven curriculum. If the couples are in the class for a short period of time, leaders may choose to use topical curriculum. However, if young

married adults are in a class for several years, a broader curriculum that addresses overall spiritual formation would be important.

Concluding Thoughts

Leo Tolstoy said, “What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility.” While one of the most exciting times of adulthood is the nearlywed or newlywed stage of life, when the future appears bright and the foundations for a lifetime of living together are laid, dealing with possible incompatibility begins early in dating and engagement and continues throughout. Decisions about many areas are made during these years, and the church can play a critical role in supporting couples as they enter into this new stage of life, as well as throughout the first decade of married life.

Curt Hamner, writing on “A Theology of Marriage,” indicates that the church is responsible to promote healthy marriages and to make a difference by providing instruction on marriage that is “biblical, relevant, authentic, and gracious.”[378] In addition, he argues that practical skills cannot be overlooked. “Bringing together two sinners to live faithfully as husband and wife will take more than correct theology; it will require relational skills unique to marriage.”[379] The church is uniquely positioned with biblical truth to help support young married adults in this early stage of life that will set the course for a lifetime of walking the good pathway together.

Discussion Questions

1. Consider some young married adults you know. How are their lives different from your life (if you are single or older)? How are their lives similar to your life? How are their experiences different from those of their parents?
2. What are some of the common messages young couples receive from culture? To what extent are young couples influenced by these messages? How can churches work with young adults to interpret the messages and influences of culture?
3. How have you seen young couples impacted by technology? How have churches responded to changes in technology that take place in society?

Brainstorm several ways that a ministry to young adults might address ongoing development of technology.

4. Life-cycle transition points tend to be very stressful and thus prime opportunities for ministry. With the following life-cycle transition points that occur in early marriage, identify several ways a church could ministry to young couples: engagement, marriage, pregnancy, birth of children, children ready to enter school.
5. Brainstorm some possible ways to attract young married adults to your church. What are some approaches they might enjoy that may be different from your current church's ministry?

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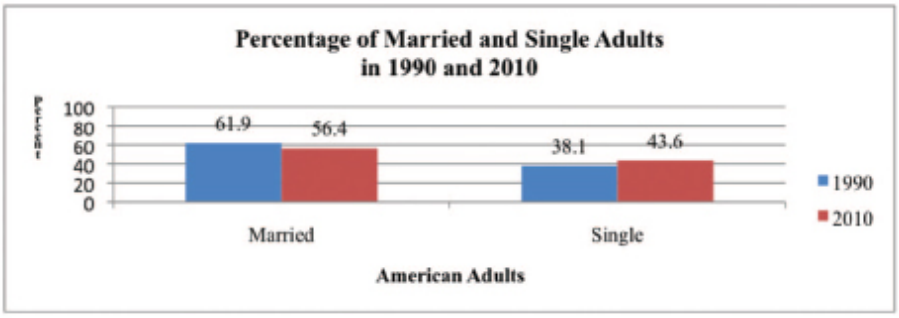
Chapter 15

DISCIPLESHIP AND BIBLE STUDY MINISTRY WITH SINGLE ADULTS

Walter H. Norvell, Ph.D.

Singles Today

Rapid change is the "stuff" of life in the twenty-first century. One place where such rapid change is evident is in marriages and singleness in the United States. Singleness is increasing significantly and with a quickening pace. While married persons increased from 112.6 million in 1990 to 129.5 million in 2010, the percentage of married persons in the total population went from 61.9% to 56.4%. Over that same period, never-married, widowed, and divorced persons grew from 69.3 million to 99.5 million, from 38.1% of the population to 43.6% of the population. Among singles, never-married singles have increased more than 21% alone. These general trends were consistently observed across all the ethnic groups tracked by the U.S. Census Bureau. In living arrangements, 119,279,000 persons over the age of fifteen were living in single person households during 2010.



The younger the single adult is, the more likely he or she has never been married. The older the single adult is, the more likely he or she is divorced or widowed. Such changes in household populations, marriage status, and singleness are affecting everything in our culture and in our churches. Unfortunately, the church is often oblivious to these changes until the church's ministries are severely impacted by these changes. What does the rise in singleness mean to the church? What models are available to guide a ministry with singles? How might the church consider engaging singles with a minstry?[380]

Biblical Models for Singleness

The Bible provides several examples of ancient persons who experienced singleness as an adult. One Old Testament personality who experienced singleness after a spouse's death was Ruth. After her husband's illness and death, she devoted her life caring for her kind and loving mother-in-law, Naomi. But, depending upon the cultural mores of the day and, what is more important, the revealed law of God, Ruth married again. Her marriage to Boaz placed her in the genealogy of Jesus.

During the last days of Jerusalem, before the fall of Judah to the world power of Babylon, Jeremiah was called as a late adolescent to serve God as his prophet. God commanded Jeremiah to never marry or have a family because his task as prophet during such extreme political and economic changes that led up to Judah's fall and captivity in Babylon would be so demanding. Jeremiah remained single in obedience to God but also because his career and difficult times did not lend themselves to the life of a married man.

In the New Testament, the main characters were both single adults. First was Jesus. His mission as the Son of God and Redeemer apparently

precluded any marital entanglements. Jesus' incarnation sanctified the human experience and the single adult experience. Jesus, while fully God, was also fully human. Therefore he successfully traversed singleness and demonstrated how to be fully human as God intended.

Last, the church's greatest missionary was Paul. While there is debate about Paul's marital status (he may have been married at some point prior to his introduction in the biblical narrative), no mention is ever made of Paul's wife or his marital status at all. But again, Paul's life demonstrated that singleness is no barrier to ministry success, kingdom work, or personal fulfillment in service to God. Paul even endorsed singleness as the preferred lifestyle.[381]

These biblical characters show us the same challenges they experienced are still challenges that single adults face today. Clearly, single adults in the biblical period were whole persons, not half persons because they were unmarried or experienced a portion of adult life as singles. None were limited in their lives or their roles by singleness in the redemptive story of the Bible. Both married persons and single persons are created in the image of God and are equally valuable to God. Properly related to God through faith in Jesus Christ, singleness is an avenue to service and life satisfaction.

> Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.
>
> To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.
>
> To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.
>
> 1 Corinthians 7:6–11 (ESV)

Who Are Single Adults?

Single adults fit into three broad categories. These are obvious distinctions but deserve attention and help ministry leaders in thinking more clearly about singles in their communities.[382]

The not-yet-married. At the onset of adulthood, most new adults are single. These form a declining category of the not-yet-married. Most adults in our culture actually plan to marry and raise families. Most of the adults in this category are actively or sporadically seeking a marriage partner. Some are dating and involved with other single friends where a possible spouse might be found.

Many factors are involved in the reasons the not-yet-married have yet to marry:

- The need for extended education and career preparation causes some young adults to postpone marriage. Many young adults are enrolled in college, university, or other career-training programs. The time demands and financial restraints many higher education students face cause them to postpone marriage.
- Some young adults are busy establishing their careers. Some career ladders require that novices devote huge amounts of time and energy to the company or the career development path. One example of career demand would be military demands when young adults are often deployed overseas or in demanding stateside assignments.
- In our current national and worldwide economic downturn, many young adults, even those who have begun careers, do not yet have the personal incomes thought sufficient to marry and establish families. Some of these young adults work multiple jobs. Some return home after their academic training is completed so they can live less expensively now while income is low. Other young adults are struggling to find worthwhile employment.

The formerly married. Many adults experience at least a portion of their adult years as formerly married because of divorce and separation. According to the Census Bureau, Americans in 2008 had a marriage rate of 10.6 and a divorce rate of 5.2. That means that out of a thousand persons, about ten to eleven persons married in 2008 and about five or six persons divorced. The marriage rate in America has declined from 15.9 in 1980 to 10.6 in 2008. The divorce rate has also declined from 7.9 in 1980 to 5.2 in 2008. Interestingly enough, the United States leads all the nations in the study in both marriage rates and divorce rates.[383]

Divorce brings a number of complications to the adult experience. First, divorced persons must face the trauma and hurt of a failed relationship.

Living and financial situations often change radically in the divorced person's life. Social connections with one's wider circle of friends and supporters are altered. Many divorced persons will experience real grief in the loss of this important aspect of their lives. Many divorced persons need support in multiple areas of their lives as they reorganize and reorient their lives after the divorce. Some female divorced persons, particularly those with children, are thrown into poverty.

The widowed. In increasing numbers throughout the adult lifespan, many married adults will once again be single through the loss of a spouse in death. While common among the elderly, widowhood is not limited to the elderly. Some will lose a spouse suddenly to disease or accidental death. More however will walk through their spouse's gradual health failure and death. Some surviving spouses will incur medical debt and, with a loss of income, experience changing financial status. Family and other social networks will change as singleness returns. Mortality in widowhood is higher than that for married persons. For women, about 700,000 lose their husbands to death each year and on average experience about fourteen years of widowhood. In 2000, our country had about 11 million widows and about 2.6 million widowers.[384] The picture of men surviving the death of their wives is different. It is more socially acceptable for widowers to remarry, but it is "widowed men who have an excess risk of dying in every cohort and nearly every age."[385] About 70% of widows over the age of sixty-five live alone.[386]

The never married. A few adults never marry. The reasons for never marrying are many. Some decide to live a single life so as to devote themselves to a career. Others become involved in the care of aging parents, and so they do not develop a relationship that results in marriage. Some may not marry because of physical or emotional health issues. Some may not marry so they can carry out religious commitments. Some are simply not interested in married life. Among all singles, just 16% say they are currently looking for a romantic partner. That amounts to 7% of the adult population. Some 55% of singles report no active interest in seeking a romantic partner. This is especially true for women, for those who have been widowed or divorced, and for older singles. Yet even among the youngest adults, the zest for romance is somewhat muted: 38% of singles ages eighteen to twenty-nine say they are not currently looking for a romantic partner, compared to

22% in that age cohort who are looking for partners. The rest say they are in committed relationships.[387]

Single parents. Across all four of the broad categories of single adult lifestyle is another distinctive of adult life—parenting. Many single adults in each of these categories are also parents. While a smaller number of not-yet-marrieds and never-marrieds have children than formerly marrieds, child-bearing outside of marriage does not have the social stigma it once had, and so more single women have children alone and on their own without a husband present. Also, adoption rules have relaxed so that more single adults may adopt children. Some single adults have to take responsibility for nephews and nieces when their siblings die or become unfit parents.

Single parenting comes with its own unique challenges. For instance, between 1960 and 1995, the number of children living apart from one of their parents increased from 12% to almost 40%, the rate of divorce increased by more than 200%, and the fraction of children born out of wedlock rose from about 5% to more than 30%. Half of all American children today are expected to spend part of their childhood in a family headed by a mother who is divorced, separated, unwed, or widowed.[388]

A single parent does not have a spouse to share the parenting responsibilities. There is not another parent to give the single parent some release time or relief. The single parent bears all the responsibility all the time. Then, all this responsibility will usually happen on only one income. Even if the other parent pays child support or if the family qualifies for assistance from government agencies, that financial help is rarely enough. When a divorce occurs, the custodial parent's income usually drops significantly. If parents divorce and remain divorced for at least six years, the single-parent family's income drops about 40–45%.[389] In most divorce cases, the custodial parent is the mother. Even if the father is active and supportive, the weight of the responsibility still falls on the mother. Often, single parents turn again to their aging parents for help with raising their children. Single parenting is an enormous responsibility. In 2007 about 21.8 million children (or 26.3%) in America lived in one-parent households.[390] Ministry to and with single parents is challenging.

Bible Study Ministry and Discipleship with Single Adults

In the church, single adult work is adult work. While single adults share uniqueness among themselves, they are adults and continue to have much in common with all adults. Good and proven adult teaching and learning techniques apply to single adults. Effective organization and leadership in single adult ministry supports the discipling, training, and spiritual transformation of single adults. Churches must not yield to older models of single adult ministry that seem more like old youth ministry, offering dating services and activities without a strong biblical and discipleship foundation. The church must shape single adult ministry from the perspective of that church's mission statement and core values.

Single adults learn like other adults. Single adults learn in the same manner as *all* adults, which is usually on a need-to-know basis. What creates this need-to-know basis is often the problems that adults face. Therefore adults learn most effectively as problem solvers. Discipleship training and Bible study are usually effective with single adults, and all adults, when they can see meaningful application in the training and study, all done in a caring and safe community.

Single adults benefit from intentional, varied ministry models. Three basic approaches can be taken in training and discipling single adults. One, a single adult ministry can be developed that focuses entirely on the single adult experience and excludes married adults from the ministry so the focus can be maintained. All classes and small groups are open only for single adults and they are facilitated by single adults. The benefits of such a ministry include a thorough understanding of the single adult experience. This style of ministry can bring specialized vocational ministers to lead and guide. However, creating such a narrow focus can quarantine singles from significant relationships with married adults who can contribute to the lives of single adults in the congregation.

A church may also choose to mainstream single adults, integrating them into the larger body of adults involved in discipleship, Bible study, ministry, and missions. After all, single adults learn like all adults learn. While a church is a unique community of diversity, united in the common shared life of Christ, mainstreaming can prevent the church from addressing the unique needs of single adults. And, since the society at large has such a high percentage of singles, the church may be hampered in reaching unchurched singles with the gospel. Many churches can overlook the presence of single adults because their focus is so strongly directed toward support and

encouraging traditional families. Singles in such ministry may feel neglected or even intentionally ignored. Such an approach may communicate that singles are less than whole persons and persons of real value are married.

Many churches will do well in single adult ministry by creating a hybrid form, combining various aspects of a closed, single-adult-only ministry with mainstreaming singles into the full life of the congregation. A combined approach recognizes the unique needs of singles and therefore can craft ministry for unique responses to those needs while fully embracing and engaging single adults in the complete fellowship of the church and its work.

Single adults need leadership. Ministry with and to singles requires capable and trained leadership. Leaders in this ministry must understand the challenges and opportunities that face single adults in their local communities. These leaders should be well schooled in the church's mission statement, core values, and strategies so as to see the context for single adult work in their church. They must show compassion and model authentic Christian living. Leaders in single adult ministry need not be limited to single adults. Both single adult and married adult leaders can provide caring ministry and discipleship to singles so that God can work to transform lives.

Single adults require special considerations. All this being said, some special considerations should be thoughtfully evaluated:

- Singles, like all adults, need a sense of community and belonging in an atmosphere of safety. Since singles usually live alone, the church can be a strong community to them. Single parents also need community. Church can provide the respite single parents may need from time to time. Men can step forward to provide role models for children who may not have access to a father figure. Women can provide feminine role models for children without access to a mother figure. As a body needs each of its many, varied parts, the body of Christ provides the way for believers to have fellowship together and to combine their uniqueness in pursuit of the mission of the church.
- Community helps singles share their lives. Providing a safe community allows singles to tell and hear the faith stories of others without fear of rejection or reprisal. While many churches develop rather large classes of adults for Bible study experiences like Sunday School, most will experience greater community and safety in smaller groups of about eight persons. Single adult work will benefit from using larger groups for general Bible study and smaller, intimate groups where people can

get to know others and feel safe to let others know them. All persons are made for community, even singles.

- Recognize that many single adults will have additional time and resources to focus on the ministry and mission of the church. Singles do not have many of the family entanglements that married adults have. Their singleness may be the key to greater service to Jesus.
- Some single adults will have greater demands upon their time and resources. Such singles need additional support that the church can provide through its Bible study and discipleship ministries. Single adult ministry leaders should respond to such singles with compassionate assistance. Leaders will want to find ways to involve others in ministry to singles in need.
- Single adults may benefit from the strategic use of social media. The Internet may be useful in helping connect the church to single adults and helping connect single adults to other single adults in the ministry. Social media can facilitate a sense of community when supported by the face-to-face community that the local church provides.
- Single parents will likely need much support from the church. Special attention should be focused on creating effective childcare during single adult activities and to age-group ministries to preschoolers, children, and students/youth. Such excellence in age-group ministries helps the single parent find support and feel confidence in their parenting. Even for single parents, the church is not to replace their role of being the primary spiritual teachers in the lives of their children but should enhance and develop such parenting skills. The support and encouragement provided to single parents is just invaluable. Training in parenting is very beneficial to singles with children.
- Finally, ministry to singles should include divorce recovery and grief ministry. Providing assistance through divorce recovery is not condoning divorce but simply recognizing its prevalence in our society. Divorce recovery can bring the redemptive power of the gospel to the deep wounds caused by divorce. Likewise, grief ministry is a step toward obeying the biblical command to care for the widow and the orphan. Development of these compassionate ministries will give care to hurting and wounded believers along with compassionate outreach to hurting lost and unchurched singles in the community.

Effective Ministry with Singles Includes:

- Creating community
- Providing safety
- Understanding singles' time resources
- Utilizing social media
- Providing encouragement and support
- Developing life skills and crisis intervention strategies

Conclusion

In many communities, the ministry opportunities to and for single adults are increasing. Families are changing. An on-mission church will recognize these needs and opportunities in designing strategies and ministries that appeal to singles.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some advantages and disadvantages of being single in our contemporary culture?
2. How and why is singleness changing in our culture?
3. What insights does the Bible provide for us in developing ministry to and with single persons in our churches?
4. What priorities should a church have in establishing ministry and discipleship with single adults? How would these priorities be communicated to the church and community?
5. Evaluate your church's ministry with single adults. What are its strengths? How can it be improved?

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Chapter 16

LEADING THE FORMATION OF MEDIAN ADULT DISCIPLES

Bayne B. Pounds, Ph.D.

Why do I exist? What happens when I die? What do I want from the rest of my life? What's wrong with this world? Are we living on a dying planet? Who or what has the power? Does God really exist? If so, what is He like? How can I personally be fulfilled and enjoy life? How can I have a strong relationship with my children and grandchildren? How can I live with integrity while juggling the needs of children and elderly parents?

Despite continuing to ask these kinds of questions, median adults enter a time of the lifespan known as the season of leadership.[391] Because society, the church, and the next generation look to median adults for wise leadership, Christian educators are in a unique position to help equip and release mature adults who share the gospel—who are salt (causing people to be thirsty for the Living Water) and light (the hope of the Gospel to a very dark world). We do a disservice to median adults (or to anyone) in allowing them to be big babies occupying pews and drinking bottles of milk. Rather, Christian educators enable median adults to be grounded with a biblical worldview and empowered to reach the nations with the gospel. With seven billion people (and rising) on our planet, and more than six thousand unreached people groups, the need for actively engaged believers has never been more critical. Fortunately, median adults are a ready source for sending out.

Essentials of Median Adults

Demographics. Median adulthood spans the years forty to forty-five through sixty to sixty-five; however, as adults live healthier lives, midlife is starting later and lasting longer (as in "Sixty is the new forty"). In the U.S., the category of the population aged forty-five to sixty-four is projected to increase significantly over the next decades. In 2010, there were 80,980,000 median adults; by 2050, there will be 98,490,000 (an increase of nearly 18,000,000). By gender, there were 39,467,000 males aged forty-five to sixty-four in 2010; by 2050, this number will be 48,516,000 (an increase of 9,000,000). In 2010, there were 41,513,000 females (forty-five to sixty-four); by 2050, there will be 49,974,000 (an increase of 8,400,000).[392] As the American population ages faster than the world average, social and political priorities will shift to policies reflecting an older population (for example, health issues related to the elderly).

Traits. Researchers continue to find that stability in life peaks during middle adulthood, and the so-called midlife crisis is rare. Affectionate love increases in middle adulthood. Many median adults become grandparents. Median adults are generally more compassionate, more reflective, more judicious, and more genuinely loving of themselves and others. Median adult women serve an important role in society in helping to connect the generations (and are labeled "kinkeepers" by some researchers).[393] Median adults are faced with death more often (elderly parents and older relatives) than in earlier stages of life and simultaneously are faced with the reality of less time remaining in their own lives. Physical changes usually are gradual, and there are fewer accidents during median adulthood than advanced adulthood. Middle adults also are less susceptible to colds and allergies. Cancer is the leading cause of death in middle age, replacing heart disease, which is now second. The majority of median adults maintain a moderate or strong interest in sex (although it occurs less frequently than in young adulthood), and fertility declines. Verbal memory, vocabulary, inductive reasoning, and spatial orientation peak during median adulthood, while reaction time declines. Work remains an important aspect of the middle adult years, but challenges include the globalization of work, rapid changes in information technologies, early retirement offers/downsizing, concerns about future retirement income, and health care.[394]

Developmental tasks. Erik Erikson first identified the seventh psychosocial stage (ages forty to sixty-five) as one faced with a crisis of

creating generatively or living in stagnation. Crucial to median adulthood is finding how to contribute in meaningful ways to the next generation and how to leave a significant legacy to those coming behind. Ready to make the most of the second half of adulthood, median adults compare reality to earlier dreams. They realize they have not achieved basic goals and ambitions and have little time remaining to "make their mark." They sense that life is short, and in order to pass on the torch, they search for ways to invest in people or things that will outlast them. Although sibling relationships continue throughout life, median adults experiencing stagnation are unable to connect with the larger society in a meaningful way, resulting in feeling disconnected and unproductive.

Median adults play multiple roles in their homes and society. Just as they are launching their young adult children and becoming empty nesters (which increases marital satisfaction for most parents), median adults increasingly care for their elderly parents. Known as the "sandwich" generation, median adulthood involves caring for two generations at once and attempting to meet their competing needs (teen/young adult children still needing significant direction, and aging parents whose health and/or economic problems require intervention). Current median adults also have experienced less stable families due to high divorce rates and less stable financial goals, which are much more difficult to achieve due to a fluctuating economy. As with the population in general, median adults have diverse lifestyles and represent multiple cultures and ethnicities.[395]

What Median Adults Experience in Church

What happens, if anything, in the hearts and minds of those who attend church? Barna Research Group surveyed 1,022 adults (eighteen and older) across the U.S. to find out. Median adults (forty-seven to sixty-five) provided these answers:

Feel part of a group that cares for each other	71%
Feel a real and personal connection with God	70%
Church puts a lot of emphasis on serving poor	41%
Gained new spiritual insight or understanding	40%
Attending church affected my life greatly	28%

Source: “What People Experience in Churches,” Barna Research Group, http://www.barna.org/congregations-articles/556-what-people-experience-inchurches (accessed June 8, 2012).

Ministry points. The continual search for meaning in life during midlife is a critical point of contact for Christian educators. This attempt to make sense of life is guided by four needs: the need for purpose (having goals and achieving them; connecting the present to the future), the need for values (goodness, right/wrong; being valued), the need for a sense of efficacy (I can make a difference; I can have an effect), and the need for self-worth (being a good, worthy person; only pursued individually).[396] Christian educators believe these needs are met ultimately in a mature relationship with the living Lord.

Studies show that middle adults who do find meaning in life are physically healthier, happier, and have less depression than those who do not. Studies continue to find that most middle-aged Americans consider themselves religious and identify spirituality as a major part of their lives. In one longitudinal study, researchers report a significant increase in spirituality between late middle adulthood (mid-fifties/early sixties) and late adulthood (late sixties/early seventies), with women continuing to show a stronger interest in “religion” than men.[397] Numerous benefits exist for median adults who are committed to religion/prayer/core beliefs, such as a positive link to health, being able to cope more effectively with life, moderated/reduced blood pressure and hypertension, longevity, better coping during high stress, low depression, high self-esteem, better adjustment to loss, less worry and anxiety, purpose for living, improved psychological adjustment, meaning given to a stressful situation (such as the death of a loved one), and an avenue of personal growth.[398]

Christian educators also can minister to median adult families as they move through several distinct stages. Dale identifies these family life stages and the tasks of each: (1) the “breaking-away” family—teenagers and middle-aged parents (resist the temptation to be pals with children; allow teens freedom and protection with appropriate boundaries; prepare husband-wife relationship for empty nest); (2) the “untying the apron strings” family—launching children (passing the torch to younger generations; parents facing aging issues); (3) the “empty-nest” family—husband-wife again (becoming in-laws; grandparenthood; adult children, grandchildren, or aging

parents may move into home); (4) the “three generations” family—sandwich generation (encouraging children and grandchildren to live their own lives; establishing good relationships with grandchildren without overstepping family boundaries).[399]

Encouraging Unmarried Median Adults

Whether unmarried by choice or not, single median adults have unique spiritual and emotional needs. Some of their needs are personal, but some issues are needlessly thrust upon them by fellow brothers and sisters in the church.

Advantages. First Corinthians 7:17–40 outlines major benefits of serving the Lord as a single adult. Among them are being able to focus on loving and serving God with undivided devotion and having time to develop spiritual disciplines. Single adults can cultivate an unusual intimacy with the Lord since they are often very aware that He is all they have, and no one else is necessarily there to share the joy or sorrow of the moment.

Ministry points. Single median adults, however, struggle with loneliness, passion and purity, finances, a life without children, and facing old age alone. Rather than feeling unfulfilled or less of a person, they need to understand that God has a great plan and purpose for their lives and to be content in their present state. Christian educators can help unmarrieds prevent self-centered lifestyles but also help guard them against workaholism due to their willingness and availability to help. Bring marrieds and singles together for prayer, accountability, encouragement, and ministry so that brothers and sisters can gain wisdom and advice from one another. Help the church at large to understand that marriage may not be God’s plan for everyone, and they are not to focus on playing matchmaker for the singles in the church body. Ministries for and with single median adults could include events or activities for the special needs of singles (such as home or car maintenance, divorce recovery, fellowship, money management, or relating to children, grandchildren, or a former spouse). Divorce especially should be addressed, since being “amputated” from a spouse, children, friends, and former lifestyle is devastating.

Equipping Median Adult Disciples

With a goal of mature median adult believers, Christian educators desire the same transformed head, heart, and hands of the man in John 9 for the adults with whom they minister. As the man grew in his understanding, he progressed from “the man they call Jesus” (a great man—like Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr.) to “he is a prophet” (a great teacher—like Buddha or Confucius) to answering the question “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” with the response “Who is he? Tell me so that I may believe in him.” As Christian educators are faithful to present the gospel to median adults, they will hear “Lord, I believe” followed by the result of a transformed life “and he worshiped him.” This process of transformation for adults can be dangerous, exciting, fearful, and risky,[400] and so Christian educators must learn to foster the sharing of biblical information, knowledge, wisdom, skills, and experiences through effective communication, collaboration, and interaction.

Adult learning. The physical environment, the emotional atmosphere, cultural distinctives, various learning styles, multiple intelligences (see table, “Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences”), and different levels of spiritual maturity all affect median adult learning. In addition, teachers and learners bring unique perspectives to a ministry setting, even though a relationship with God provides a secure base for all relationships. Median adults who first encounter the claims of the gospel experience a disorientation—"a sense that things do not fit any more [and] previously taken for granted meanings do not hold”[401]—followed by the security of acknowledging the truth. Consequently, median adult leaders must provide an open environment where students are allowed to disagree, debate, and challenge ideas. By creating a climate that is respectful and informal, a leader can model how to value truthfully the perspectives, beliefs, and opinions of others. Not all learners possess the same ability to think critically, and so leaders should work hard to establish an environment where learners feel safe and comfortable in expressing themselves because they feel respected for their views. Great teachers create perplexity for transformation to occur, knowing that Jesus asked over one hundred questions in interactions with others. Make an intellectual case for the value of learning something—adults do not automatically trust a teacher or see the teacher as omniscient or infallible, but God is! His word is totally trustworthy and the final authority for a leader of median adult discipleship.

Teachers who act as facilitators by allowing participants to use their knowledge and experience realize that some adults feel intimidated when they try something new or unique. As leaders provide multiple ways and resources to learn content, adults can dialogue and interact in small and large groups as they focus on real-life problems. Because self-reflection is a necessary step for transformational learning to occur, summarize key points of discussions, lessons, or units, allowing adults to discuss implications.[402] Utilize the web as an extension of the class, and encourage median adults to share their beliefs and convictions with a larger audience.[403]

Teachers of median adults are aware they do not all think in the same way. *Reflective thinkers* view new information subjectively, connect new information to past experiences, examine their feelings about what they are learning, and *often* ask "Why?" *Creative thinkers* experiment with new information, make excellent troubleshooters, create their own solutions and shortcuts, and *always* ask "Why?" *Practical thinkers* want factual information without trivial additions, seek the simplest and most efficient way to do their work, and are not satisfied until they know how to apply their new skills to life. *Conceptual thinkers* accept new information only after seeing the big picture, want to know how things work, and learn the concepts presented along with any related concepts.[404] In addition to various thinking styles, median adult learners will have one or more preferred learning style: *concrete experience* (examples, laboratories, readings, fieldwork, simulations, films); *reflective observation* (thought questions, brainstorming, discussions, logs/journals); *abstract conceptualization* (lectures, readings, projects, model building/critiques, analogies); and *active experimentation* (examples, laboratories, fieldwork, projects, case studies, homework).[405]

Adult grouping. Dinner tables usually seat six to eight for a good reason; adults find it difficult to have conversations with larger numbers. Allow time for large groups (of any size) to break into smaller units of six to eight for dialogue and processing. Median adults find these benefits of being in groups: connections with others, common concerns and problems, information sharing, helping others, interactions with others, learning from one another, acceptance from others, belonging, support, and a boost in self-esteem.[406] A teacher of median adults then must be a spirit-filled person of integrity with good interpersonal skills who loves people and enjoys teaching. As a model of what is being taught, this teacher should cultivate

ways of thinking while facilitating self-efficacy of adult disciples. Ultimately, the teacher of median adults equips and releases disciples who do the Great Commission wherever God has planted them.

Emerging Practices with Median Adults

Why do we come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior? Why do we grow as believers? Why are we to be mature disciples? The evangelized are to evangelize, and the discipled are to disciple in order to reach the nations for Jesus Christ. How can a church or ministry produce mature disciples? Begin by understanding why median adults choose to be part of a local church. (See sidebar "What Median Adults Experience in Churches"). Then, discern where your median adults are spiritually. Searcy developed an adult discipleship taxonomy to help Christian educators understand the faith maturity levels of adult believers. Utilizing ten components of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of the Christian life, Searcy identifies six levels of faith maturity that build on the work of Kohlberg and Fowler. By using Searcy's descriptions, Christian educators can determine specific ways of ministering to median adults at each level of maturity, since discipling is the answer for the questions of median adults. According to Searcy, a median adult can be at any one of these levels of maturity, and each level has its own distinct needs and ministry opportunities.[407]

Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

Verbal/Linguistic
Read, write, and communicate with words
Use language to express thoughts and understand others orally or written
Learn best through use of words—reading, writing, listening
Enjoy speeches, debates, stories, poems, essays, word games
May have large vocabularies

Logical/Mathematical
Able to reason and calculate numbers, quantities, operations
Use, appreciate, and help others understand abstract relationships
See patterns in the world and can reason through problems
Rely heavily on analogies, enjoy puzzles and games

Visual/Spatial
Able to think in pictures and visualize future results
Able to imagine in mind's eye as well as in concrete ways
Understand space and distance concepts easily
Relate well with visuals and other representations of reality

Body/Kinesthetic (Physical)
Use all or part of body to create, solve, or present ideas and emotions
Active people, usually well-coordinated
Enjoy mission projects as well as sports and dramatic activities

Musical/Rhythmic
Create, communicate, and understand meanings made from sounds
Compose music, sing, keep rhythm, may "move" while listening
Hear music, tones, rhythm, pitch, and larger musical patterns
Good listeners

Interpersonal (Relational)
Recognize and distinguish feelings and intentions
Work effectively with others and empathize
Highly social, make friends easily, good talkers
Drawn to activities that involve people

Intrapersonal (Reflective)
Have accurate mental model of self, who they are, how they feel
May prefer working alone, comfortable with solitude
Seek ways of self-expression

Natural/Naturalist
Can distinguish among, classify, use features of environment
Can discriminate among living things, see patterns in natural world
Relate well to creation stories, stories involving nature
Like to explore and seek beauty in God's creation

To read more about multiple intelligences, see Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences,* 3d. ed. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

To help median adults mature in their faith and invest in the next generation, Christian educators can help facilitate mentoring and apprenticeship relationships among generations. Median adults can help individuals and families adopt the following healthy traits: communicating and listening (Ephesians 4:31–32); affirming and supporting one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11); showing respect for others (Hebrews 12:9); developing a sense of trust (Psalm 20:7); having a sense of positive play and humor (Deuteronomy 11:19; Heb. 10:24–25); exhibiting a sense of shared responsibility (Romans 14:11—12); teaching a sense of right and wrong (Proverbs 22:6); having a strong sense of family in which positive rituals and traditions abound (Leviticus 23; Exodus 12:26—27); having a shared belief system (Eph. 6:4 ; Deut. 6:4—9); respecting the privacy of one another (Matthew 6:6); valuing service to others (Acts 20:35); and seeking help (James 1:2—4).[408] Using information technology, median adults can disciple younger adults by writing articles/posts on topics related to the lifespan and discipleship, such as marriage issues, parenting concerns, communication hints, problem-solving skills, family worship times, and hospitality as a family. Further, median adults are primed to aid the family and church community in identifying and meeting mission and social justice needs.

Searcy's Levels of Adult Discipleship

	Babe in Christ	Childish Faith	Legalist	Situationalist	Principled Person	Character
Worldview/ Missions	The world is how I see it.	The world is how the group sees it.	The world is how culture sees it.	I realize some people see the world in a weird way.	I realize people have valid reasons for seeing the world in a different way.	I want to know how God sees the world.
Attitude/ Ethics	I need to develop a willingness to learn.	I need a positive attitude.	I need to truly believe the facts.	I need to organize my beliefs into a way of living.	I need to live what I believe.	I need to be what I believe.
Relationships/ Interpersonal	I relate to those who relate to me.	I relate to those who are like me.	I relate to people like me; I talk to people different from me.	I relate to people who may have erroneous ideas.	I relate to anyone who needs my help.	I relate to everyone as a potential brother or sister.
Thinking/ Knowledge of Jesus	I need to learn the basic facts.	I need to understand the facts.	I need to relate the facts to real life.	I need to break down a concept into its smallest parts.	I need to combine old ideas into new packages.	I need to objectively evaluate things, including myself.

	Babe in Christ	Childish Faith	Legalist	Situationalist	Principled Person	Character
Skills/ Witnessing	I need training.	I need to work under another's guidance.	I need to do things on my own.	I need a high degree of proficiency in my work.	I need to do the usual tasks in creative ways.	I need to come up with new ideas, concepts, and methods.
Learning/ Bible Study	I study what interests me.	I study in order to graduate.	I study because I don't know.	I study to defend my position.	I study to understand another's position as well as my own.	I study to understand God's truth, wherever it is found.
Will/Unity	I do what I want.	I do what makes people happy.	I do what people expect.	I do what I think is right.	I do what I think is best for all involved.	I do what God wants because it's what I want, also.
Authority/ Leadership	I listen to authorities.	I listen to people I trust.	I listen to well-tested ideas, concepts, laws, and principles.	I listen to perspectives my experiences have proven to be true.	I listen to information from any reputable source.	I listen to God.
Decisions/ Living	I decide based on punishment or praise.	I decide based on the reactions of others.	I decide based on the law.	I decide based on the situation and its context.	I decide based upon the Bible.	I decide based upon who I am.
Faith/ Maturity	The cross is a symbol to me.	The cross is my salvation.	The cross represents God's love to me.	The cross represents the atoning death of Christ whereby I am saved.	The cross is a symbol of salvation for everyone and should be the emblem of missionary action.	"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Source: Timothy Searcy. "Levels of Adult Discipleship." Unpublished presentation in a doctoral seminar on the history, philosophy, and theology of Christian education at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. New Orleans, LA. October 2009. Used by permission.

Discussion Questions

1. Who are the median adults in your church or ministry? How many live within a ten-mile radius of your ministry setting? What are the demographics of this group? How many are unmarried? What resources are available to help you find out?
2. What are some of the challenges unmarried median adults experience today? What changes will your church or ministry need to make if you are going to meet the needs of single adults in your community? What ministries have you done, or heard other churches are doing, that have been effective in ministering to unmarried median adults?
3. Discuss ways a church or ministry can support median adults as they attempt to complete successfully the developmental tasks of midlife.
4. What are some ways your church or ministry is helping median adults "pass on the torch" to the next generation?
5. For each of the six maturity levels of adult Christian disciples developed by Searcy (babe in Christ, childish faith, legalist, situationalist, principled person, and character), brainstorm and discuss specific ways to help median adults move from one level to the next for each of the ten components (world view/missions, attitude/ethics, relationships/interpersonal relationships, thinking/knowledge of Jesus, skills/witnessing, learning/Bible study, will/unity, authority/leadership, decisions/living, and faith/maturity).
6. What are the social justice ministry opportunities in your area? How can you help median adults facilitate involvement with these needs?

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Chapter 17



LEADING THE FORMATION OF SENIOR ADULT DISCIPLES

Margaret Lawson, Ph.D.

Senior adults are an extremely diverse group. People live so much longer than they used to that the senior adult age span has increased considerably. It is not unusual for a church to have member who is over one hundred in age. Senior adults today do not necessarily fit the image many people imagine when they hear the term. What picture does it conjure up for you? Do you picture an old woman sitting in a rocker with crochet on her lap? Or do you picture a Sunday School class sitting in rows with someone reading out of the teacher's quarterly? Both of these scenes could probably be found today, but this is not the norm. It has been predicted that by the year 2030, about one out of every five Americans, or 20% of our population, will be a senior citizen.

Almost two decades ago, attention began to focus on the new generation of senior adults currently known as the baby boomers. Soon the baby boomers would become senior adults and would present an entirely new set of challenges, particularly in the church. They proclaimed that as the fabled baby boomers begin to hit sixty-five in 2010, they would radically affect our ideas of growing old. Their values would be decidedly different from the oldest-old cohort of today. Churches were challenged to plan accordingly.

In addition to the baby boomers, the total number of senior citizens in the United States is rapidly increasing. During the past two decades or more, there has been an increasing emphasis on what some have termed, "The

Graying of America." Older people are living longer and enjoying better health in their later years. Many have felt the need to point out this phenomenon, and some have even addressed it within the boundaries of the church. As early as 1994, Anderson says, "America is graying… literally. The first wave of baby boomers has already crashed upon the shores of mid-life. Their parents, a generation beyond that milestone, are senior adults. With advances in healthcare and medicine, people are living longer. Senior adulthood, and consequently, retirement, can last a long, long time."[409]

Has the church today made appropriate adjustments? Anderson concludes with a word that is relevant to us today: "Churches all around the world should be 'catching the age wave' and learning how to develop, strengthen, and multiply their senior adult ministries. If you have senior adult responsibilities or simply have an interest in this age group, don't miss this opportunity!"[410] Our concepts of aging reflect a lifetime of attitudes, biases, and experiences. There are many myths and misunderstandings, but to provide effective ministry plans for the senior age group, it is vital to understand who senior adults are. Many ideas have been proposed for organizing senior adults in order to provide for their needs inside and outside the church.

Any attempt to categorize senior adults from age fifty to more than one hundred provides a challenge. Some experts have spent time studying the new wave consisting of the baby boomers. Others have specialized in the older segment of the group, focusing on elder care for the vast segment of the population who are eighty-five and older. Changing attitudes about aging can be seen in everyday living. Old age is portrayed in television commercials and in the news media as people out enjoying life, hiking, and being a part of the community, and not sitting in rocking chairs.

Explore the Biblical Basis

Perhaps the most appropriate starting point for the church is the record of seniors portrayed in Scripture. There are many helpful Bible teachings on the nature of aging, characteristics of the aged, responsibilities of older people, and the care of older people. There are also accounts of people who lived to a very old age and whose accomplishments in later life won the favor of God. Old age is regarded as a blessing from God (Deuteronomy 5:33).

There are numerous examples in the Bible of those we would call senior adults doing the work that God called them to do: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jethro, Joshua, Caleb, Hannah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, Paul, and John the apostle. When God spoke, they responded and followed his command. No form of spiritual retirement is recorded in Scripture. Just a few examples will suffice.

Genesis 12 records the call of Abram. He was seventy-five years of age when God called him to leave his homeland and depart for Haran. Through Abraham's obedience God promised to establish a nation. Exodus contains the account of Moses at the age of eighty being told by God to return to Egypt and to free God's people from bondage and captivity (see Exodus 3:1–10; Numbers 14:34; Deut. 34:6–8). The New Testament also provides an example of a woman who was well on in years when the Lord blessed her with a son. Luke 1:7 clearly states that they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and they were both advanced in years. That child was John the Baptist, the forerunner to Jesus.

In the Bible, those who were called by God for a special ministry and purpose serve to illustrate that God does not stop involving people in ministry when they reach older adulthood, and neither does God take away His blessing when people reach the age of sixty-five. Psalm 92:14 reminds us that in old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and "full of sap" (NASB). And they are to be treated with respect: "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:32, NIV84).

The common denominator in each of these examples, other than the age factor, is the important role each played in the history of God's people. They were used in the service of the Lord, and He accomplished mighty things through them. Today, seniors can have a profound influence for the Lord if they are given the opportunity and the training. This is the challenge to the church. However, for the church to make any attempt to minister to and with senior adults, there must be a framework of organization within which to work.

Who Are the Seniors Inside and Outside the Church?

Attempts to categorize senior adults have taken many forms. One benchmark is the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), which offers benefits to senior adults beginning at age fifty. Also, developmental

psychologists through the years have made attempts to describe the changes that take place through the lifespan. Erikson proposed eight stages of psychosocial development, and he described the range from forty to sixty as Middle Adulthood and sixty-five and older as Later Adulthood.[411] Robert Havighurst delineated developmental tasks for various stages of life from infancy through older adulthood. The noted psychologist Jean Piaget, parallel with Havighurst, recognized stages of cognitive development known as mental maturation. Six stages of moral development were researched by Lawrence Kohlberg. Levinson propounded a life structure theory and is significant because he recognized that development takes place well into the older years. He defined Middle Adulthood (forty to sixty-four), Late Adulthood (sixty to eighty-five) and Late Late Adulthood (eighty and over). Another proponent of three generations of senior adult development designated the Young Old (sixty-five to seventy-four), Middle Old (seventy-five to eighty-five), and the Old Old (eighty-five-plus).[412]

Finally, James Fowler attempted to show that faith development is also incremental. He proposed six stages of faith that relate closely to Kohlberg's moral developmental stages and that include cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements of religious development at different life stages.[413]

Each of these theories has formed the basis of discussion and debate in relation to adult education, and from them theories of teaching and learning have been derived. Much literature is available on each of these theorists, and a study of their contributions is certainly helpful in ministry to adults in the church.[414]

Another popular approach is to consider adulthood from a generational perspective. A generation is usually defined by the major events that occurred within its time span. In recent years some have suggested that the best way to consider grouping senior adults is according to generations. Senior adults today can be divided into three separate generations: G.I. Generation or PowerBuilders, born 1901–1925, the Silent Generation or PeaceMakers, born 1926–1944, and the Boomer Generation or PathFinders, born 1945–1963. The last group may live into their late eighties and nineties, remaining healthy and active.[415]

More recently James Fisher presented a five-stage framework that could be helpful to church leaders charged with planning educational programs and activities for older persons. He designated life events that typically occur at each stage, and each of these presents opportunities for ministry. Fisher's

framework also has application to grouping and grading adults for Bible Study. Instead of strict age grading for seniors, Fisher suggests considering a class or department for each period. This allows seniors to be grouped not by strict age grading but by lifestyle.[416] Age is not always a reliable indication of an elder's quality of life. Themes from each life stage may be seen in the chart, "Five-Stage Framework for Planning."[417]

Five-Stage Framework for Planning

Stage	Actions and Characteristics
Continuity with middle age	• Retirement plans pursued • Middle-age lifestyle continued • Other activities substituted for work
Early transition	• Involuntary transitional events such as onset of ill health or death of spouse • Voluntary transitional events such as moving
Revised lifestyle	• Adaptation to changes of early transition • Stable lifestyle appropriate to older adulthood • Socialization realized through age-group affiliation
Later transition	• Loss of health and mobility • Need for assistance and/or care • Loss of autonomy
Final period	• Adaptation to changes of later transition • Stable lifestyle appropriate to level of dependency • Sense of finitude, mortality

James Fisher, "A Framework for Describing Developmental Change Among Adults," *Adult Education Quarterly* 43, no. 2, 1993, cited in *Understanding Today's Adults*, 49–50.

How Do Senior Adults Learn?

Organizing senior adults for learning is one side of the coin. The other is to understand how they learn and to convince them they still can learn. In the years described as senior, there is an open door to continued learning. The Bible indicates that individuals ought to continue to grow and mature in their faith. The apostle Paul said he was pressing on "toward the goal" (Philippians 3:13–14, NASB). Paul also indicated that the task of the church is to build up believers and present them mature in the faith (Colossians

1:28). What motivates older adults to continue being transformed in Christ? And what are the stepping stones along the way?

Our concepts of aging reflect a lifetime of attitudes, biases, and experiences. In recent years, the church has allowed seniors to sit back and say, “I have had my turn. Let the younger people do it now.” While there may be some truth to that, there is always something for someone to do. In fact, many of the “new older” people have taken early retirement to embark on a second career of ministry. The question is whether the churches are ready to mobilize and equip the new wave of seniors. Most seniors have a realistic perception of the aging process. They live in a world of change and are vital human beings who want to be self-directed and make a meaningful contribution to their church and society.[418]

Equipping seniors for ministry requires an understanding of who they are and how they learn. The key to learning for adults is found in shifting the focus from the teacher to the learner. Focusing attention on the adult as a learner in the context of the church, the definition Ford provides is helpful. He defined learning simply as “a lasting change in knowledge, understanding, skill, attitudes and values, brought about by experience.”[419] As seniors engage in the learning process, they will continue to grow and mature.

Amid many theories of learning, Malcolm Knowles provided insights that enable adults of all ages to be challenged to learn. Knowles’s theory of adult learning has influenced adult educators for several decades. His theory is based on the conviction that adults and children learn differently.[420] Therefore, just as *pedagogy*[421] refers to the art and science of teaching children, so Knowles coined the term *andragogy*[422] to refer to the art and science of leading adults to learn.[423] His concepts purport to show how adults approach learning.[424] If this is so, teaching senior adults should take these criteria into consideration.

The need to know. Adult learners need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it. Many seniors have been in church all their lives and yet often feel inadequate in Bible knowledge.

Learner self-concept. Adults need to be responsible for their own decisions and to be treated as capable of self-direction. Seniors are able to analyze information, often seen as conflicting, and arrive at their own conclusions. Self-directed learning requires that they enter into the learning

situation and have opportunity to discuss options and reflect on personal life needs.

Role of learners' experience. Adult learners have a variety of experiences of life that represent the richest resource for learning. They need time and freedom to exercise their thinking and place it on the table so newer convictions can be discovered from the sharing of experiences.

Readiness to learn. Adults are ready to learn those things they need to know in order to cope effectively with life situations. In their approach to learning, adults are willing to venture out into new territory if they can see the need for it.

Orientation to learning. Adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that it will help them perform tasks they confront in their life situations. Life stages and transitions referred to earlier lead senior adults into new situations. Dealing with life crises, such as the loss of a spouse, helps them to develop coping mechanisms and offer wise advice to others in the same situations.

A viable senior adult ministry can be developed using a life stage model such as Fisher's and training leaders to teach adults appropriately.

A Senior Adult Ministry

All the stages of senior adulthood and the needs of the individuals within that age group cannot possibly be met by a one-hour meeting in a Sunday School or Bible study class. A vibrant seniors' ministry will serve as an attraction to many both inside and outside the church. For all the reasons given earlier and because Scripture gives significance to older persons, we recognize that they are individuals of value and deserve the attention of the church.

Components of a Senior Adult Ministry

Purpose or mission. *The purpose or mission of the church provides the parameters for the ministry.* Usually this statement incorporates the functions of the church, such as worship, Bible study, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, evangelism, and missions. Any ministry within the local church needs to consider the overall purpose of the church, and anything that is appropriate within the entire context of the church may be considered to be viable by any ministry of the church.

- What about your congregation?
- Is your church intentional in its ministry with older adults?
- Are older adults full participants in the life of your congregation and invited to share their faith with others?

Biblical foundation. A biblical foundation is essential. A philosophy of senior adult education should be grounded in the word of God. Some denominations also have a statement of faith that becomes the channel through which the senior adult ministry will be expressed.

Based on needs of people. The needs of the people who form the target audience provide a rationale for the ministry to take place. The wide variety of needs of the total age span should be assessed and evaluated. It is recognized that not every individual need may be met within the purview of the church. Some needs, however, can be met, and Christians have a responsibility to be as concerned about this age group as any other.

- What does a senior adult ministry look like?
- What is involved in its implementation?
- What does it offer to seniors, and what do they bring to the church?

Objectives and philosophy. The objectives and philosophy guide the rationale for each type of ministry within the program. They demonstrate the reason for an individual ministry and show what its formation will do for the people and for the church.

Organization and curriculum. Senior adult ministry might embrace many things. At the outset consideration should be given to numbers, age span, leadership, facilities, finances, and other similar organizational factors. Most churches will be wise to start small and grow, rather than to take on too much. It is also probably prudent to plan for a year, in conjunction with the other ministries of the church.

Trained leaders. Leaders should be trained to plan and implement activities and programs. Each of these ministries should be represented on a planning committee or council or leadership team.

Program opportunities. Most churches will not be able to initiate a fully functioning senior adult ministry, and it may begin with just one program, event, or activity. It is important to balance studies, social activities, volunteer opportunities, structured teaching, group events, etc. This program should remain flexible and change with the changing needs of the people.

A generic model. The possibilities for programming as they relate to the needs of seniors will differ from church to church. Each church has its own particular culture and context, but there are some needs that are typical of seniors. For example, Bible study is Bible study, whether you call it Sunday School, cell groups, open groups, or home groups.

An effective senior adult ministry grows out of the biblical mandate and mission of the church, is grounded in the word of God, and is designed to meet the needs of the people. In programming it is important to balance studies, social activities, volunteer opportunities, structured teaching, group events. The program should remain flexible and change with the changing needs of the people. Older adults have faith needs that may be overlooked by active, growing congregations. The call to make disciples of Jesus Christ does not mean just making disciples of children, youth, and young adults! Older adults also need to experience a new (or renewed) relationship with God through Jesus Christ and to grow in faith maturity.

The words of the psalmist echo: "Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come" (Psalm 71:17–18, NIV).

Discussion Questions

1. How has your image of senior adults changed as a result of reading this chapter?
2. Why should churches address the needs of senior adults in their churches and communities today?
3. Based on Kohlberg's and Fowler's categories of senior adults presented in this chapter, list one person you know in each category.
4. Explain the "Five Stages Framework for Planning" given by Fisher.
5. List and describe the components of a senior adult ministry for a church.

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Chapter 18



MINISTRY WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Barbara Newman, M.A.

"Everyone Welcome"

Really? Everyone? Did the church leaders actually picture "everyone" as they approved that phrase on the church sign and weekly bulletin? While the words may say that all are welcome, many persons with disabilities continue to find that sign to be untrue. Perhaps the correct wording should be "Everyone Welcome, excepting individuals who may have autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disabilities, physical challenges that are not accommodated in our building, behavioral challenges, mental illness, and sensory differences." When interacting with parents, it's clear that many have tried several churches before finding a Sunday School where their child with Down syndrome would be welcome. When interviewing adults with disabilities, you will hear similar stories of persons who have been asked to leave a worship setting, put in isolated rooms, or given directions to the church down the road that "may have something for you there."

Note to reader

"Person first" language should be used. For example, it is important *not* to say "a Down syndrome man" or "an autistic woman" but instead to say "a man with Down syndrome" or "a woman with autism." However, a few exceptions were made in the chapter; for example, I used a negative example about "Spina Bifida Carlos." The terms "handicapped"

and “special needs” were avoided for the most part. Instead, “persons (or people) with disabilities,” the correct phrase of the time, was used in this chapter.

These stories as well as some current statistics suggest churches need to give greater consideration to why and how one includes an individual with a disability.

National statistics show that about 20% of the US population have some sort of disability.[425]

Church Impact: If 20% of persons have some type of a disability, churches need to think beyond creating a “room” or “area” or even a “separate ministry.” Churches need to discover how that 20% can be an integral part of children’s ministry, youth group, women’s ministry, men’s ministry, senior citizen groups, and worship services.

Persons with disabilities attend church less often than persons without disabilities. A 2010 Harris Poll indicates that 57% of people in the US attend church, synagogue, or a faith community at least one time per month. For persons with disabilities, that number is averaged at 50%, with those with more moderate to significant areas of disability closer to 46%.[426]

Church Impact: Within a five-mile radius of any church, this poll would suggest there are persons with disabilities sitting home on a Sunday morning to a much greater degree than their peers. How might this offer an outreach opportunity for churches?

Autism rates are rising. In the 1980s, statistics showed that 1 person in 10,000 was impacted by autism. In 2011, that number is 1 in 110, having risen dramatically over the past several years.[427]

Church Impact: Statistics show that about 1% of a given congregation has some type of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). How knowledgeable and comfortable are the volunteers, leaders, and congregation members when interacting with persons with ASD? This statistic may give topic ideas for volunteer trainings and adult education.

The* New York Times *reports that of the women who have prenatal testing and discover that the unborn child has Down syndrome, about 90% of those pregnancies end in an abortion.[428]

*Church Impac*t: If churches viewed persons with Down syndrome as gifts to the community and truly embraced and welcomed each child, would parents make different decisions knowing that child will be welcomed and honored? Can positive church attitudes and actions bring that number down?

Many churches do not need to change their "Everybody Welcome" sign's wording because they are discovering the call from Scripture to embrace a church body where "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'(1 Corinthians 12:21, NIV84). That type of church is also discovering the mutual blessing that develops when persons with disabilities are an integral part of that congregation.

Defining "Disability" and Discovering a New Perspective

"Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, and or sensory impairments that in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."[429]

When considering the area of disability, it is important to remember there are two sides to that definition. The first part considers the individual who may perhaps be impacted by such areas as cerebral palsy (physical), bipolar disorder (mental), Down syndrome (intellectual), or blindness (sensory). The second part, however, is equally important when thinking about disability. "A disability results, in part, from various barriers that hinder full and effective participation in society. These barriers include: physical barriers, such as curbs without cutouts and non-accessible restrooms, communication barriers such as lack of availability of large print materials or of closed captioning of videos, and attitudinal barriers that stereotype people with disabilities."[430]

Church Impact

It's important to consider the loss and damage to the individual as well as the church as a whole when excluding persons with disabilities. When someone is sent away, not only does that person lose out on the richness of the church community, but the church also loses out on the gifts that God intended for that individual to bring to others.

In many ways, persons with disabilities have been defined by the areas of weakness or difference. Some may see "Autistic Sue" or "Spina Bifida Carlos." The Bible, however, offers a different perspective. Each one of us has a variety of gift areas as well as need areas. For all individuals, Psalm 139:13 acknowledges, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb" (NIV84). Not only has God handcrafted each individual, but God also gives each one a gift to enrich the body of Christ. First Corinthians 12 talks about the body where each part is a valued and important member. Perhaps, then, instead of "Autistic Sue," we should see Sue: an image-bearer of God, handcrafted by Him to fill an important spot in the body of Christ, considered an honored and indispensable individual who also happens to have an autism spectrum disorder.

Dr. Erik Carter highlights the importance of prepositions when interacting with persons with disabilities: "…congregations are discovering new ways of relating to people with disabilities; shifting away from ministry *apart from* or exclusively *to* people with disabilities and toward ministry that is *with and by* people with disabilities."[431] Churches using only a lens that sees "Spina Bifida Carlos" will tend to want to minister only *to* him. Churches using scriptural vision will be open to ministry *with and by* Carlos, acknowledging his presence in the community and the God-given gifts he brings. Dr. Carter also looks forward to a time when "ministry distinctions based on the presence of a disability might vanish altogether."[432]

Key Components of Including Persons with Disabilities

How does a church successfully embrace each person and the gifts that individual brings to that community? How can the church offer spiritual formation for each one? These key components seem to be part of each successful inclusive church.

Inform and engage church leaders and the congregation as a whole in understanding the importance of including persons with disabilities. Use Scripture-based resources as well as situations of individuals to paint the picture.

Get to know the gifts, needs, and stories of individuals in your congregations who are impacted in some way by a disability. Using surveys and interviews, either with that individual or parent/guardian of an individual, the church can create the starting point for putting together an

individualized plan. As part of this process, it may be helpful to learn some key components of the individual's area of disability, but it is even more important to get to know the individual.

Put together an individualized plan for the person with the disability. That plan may include ideas for involving that individual in worship settings, education classes, fellowship times, and opportunities for service. From large print Bibles to worship streamers to gluten-free communion bread to using buddies in a Sunday School class, wrap around that individual the supports needed to engage in church activities and learning. Some plans will be short and involve few extra resources. A certain pencil or seating option along with information for leaders may be all it takes to successfully include an individual. Other plans will be complex and may involve some architectural changes, on-site equipment, and additional volunteers.

Highlight a plan for the congregation and peers so that individuals can best be received into community. Many congregations miss this important step of resourcing the congregation with information and inspiration as part of the plan. If, for example, an individual uses some type of computerized system for communication, peers will need to be able to interact with that device in order to have a conversation with that person.

Key Resources

- *Autism and Faith: A Journey into Community,* by The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities
- *Autism and Your Church,* by Barbara J. Newman
- *Autism and Your Church Training DVD,* by CLC Network
- *Body Building: Devotions to Celebrate Inclusive Community,* by Barbara J. Newman
- *Child By Child: Supporting Children with Learning Differences and Their Families,* by Susan Richardson
- *Comfort My People,* by Presbyterian Church USA
- *First Conversation,* by the Bethesda Institute
- *G.L.U.E. Training Manual,* by Kimberley S. Luurtsema and Barbara J. Newman
- *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities,* by Barbara J. Newman
- *Inclusion Awareness Kit,* by CLC Network
- *Inclusion Handbook: Everybody Belongs, Everybody Serves,* by Terry A. DeYoung and Mark Stephenson

- *Inclusion Tool Box Training DVD,* by CLC Network
- *Make Heaven a Noisier Place Training DVD,* by CLC Network
- *The Special Needs Ministry Handbook,* by Amy Rapada
- *Special Needs Smart Pages,* by Joni Eareckson Tada

Helpful Ideas for Varying Ages

While those four components are important with every age group, here are some helpful tips and ideas for varying ages.

Tips and ideas for birth through preschool age children

Support the family. Some parents will find out about the area of disability before birth. This would often be true, for example, with a child with Down syndrome. Other children may have some sort of birth trauma that can cause an area of disability. A lack of oxygen, for example, may cause cerebral palsy. Other children's early development may point out some differences that allow a family to visit a doctor's office or school diagnostic team. Autism, for example, would be one of these diagnoses. Differing situations will require an understanding pastor or church leader to come alongside the family. Parents will be inundated with new information and a totally different path than expected for their child. Some will have several months to adjust to this information before even laying eyes on the baby. Others will be instantaneously thrown into this new world through a single incident or accident. Others will nurture this child for several months, expecting typical child development, and then land on a different path later in the child's life.

Whatever the path, parents will need people who can listen and support them. Interviews conducted by Amy Fenton Lee indicate that parents prefer one lead, familiar person from the church to interact with them during this diagnostic time while other church members can offer prayer and support through texting, e-mail, or a meal dropped off quickly at the home. Many parents experience a path of grieving during this time as well as numerous appointments and meetings. Congregation members may support the family by watching siblings, supplying food, doing laundry, cleaning the house, or sending quick notes of encouragement. It is often less helpful, Fenton Lee suggests from parents she interviewed, to say, "Let me know if I can help." Offer instead something specific like, "I will be over to pick up your laundry on Monday and will do this each week for two months."

Maintain a scriptural view of the child in front of the congregation. While the parents need time to adjust, the congregation needs a way to interpret the situation as well. Too many pastors stand up and make these birth announcements as though it was a funeral announcement. That sets the tone for this child's life. Remember as you visit parents, make verbal announcements, and construct written information, this little one is a child first. While the area of disability is a part of the child's life, you can talk to parents about very typical discussion points as well. "She has so much hair!" "Are you going to nurse the baby?" "I think he has your eyes." We know this child is an image-bearer of God who has been placed in the community to bring a gift to the body. This is not a death, this is a life—a life that will enrich and build the congregation. Eagerly anticipate what God will do through this little one as you give proper support and adjustment time to the parents.

Set up needed nursery and preschool supports. One of the first ways a church interacts with a baby is through a nursery. This child should also be included. The caregivers may need specific instructions and training, or a child who is medically fragile may even need some home care so the parents can enjoy attending worship together. Interview the parents to set up a safe environment for the child. Including this child from birth into the church program also affirms to parents that this little one has a place of belonging in the church along with all the other children that age. It is one of the first ways a church can say, "Everyone Welcome!"

Birth to preschool example from an effective, inclusive church

When Nicole was born, she experienced significant trauma. This resulted in a seizure disorder that required those caring for her to be trained in specific procedures and equipment. The church appointed a lead contact person to organize their efforts. In addition to supporting the parents with meals and childcare for siblings, they also arranged a team of four volunteers to receive training from parents. These individuals took turns being part of the nursery setting while parents worshipped. These individuals also agreed to give parents an occasional date night twice a month as they went into their home and provided babysitting services. Parents not only could attend church, but they also had a chance to continue to grow together as a couple.

Tips and ideas for elementary age children

Adapt and modify the environment and curriculum as needed. Part of getting to know the child will also lead to these adaptations. Is the child in a wheelchair? Is the classroom where the first graders meet accessible? What changes might need to be made to include that child in the class? What modifications in curriculum might best allow the child to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ? If the child is unable to use spoken words but can point to pictures, prayer requests might best be made by having access to pictures so the child can also participate in this conversation with God. The place to begin this process is by getting to know the child. Remember, getting a child in the room is not the ultimate goal of a church. Finding ways to allow that child to move one step closer to Jesus Christ is the ultimate goal. Find ways to reach and teach the child, preferably within the context of the typical setting for children that age.

Learn along with parents how best to use the gifts and support the needs of this child. Some children, especially those impacted with such designations as bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, learning disabilities, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and other areas of disability impacting learning and mood, will often receive that diagnosis during these elementary years. Understanding more about the areas of disability as well as medication the child may be taking can be helpful in interpreting some of the actions and words of the child in an educational and worship setting.

Develop a general intake process that can discover new issues in a child's life. Having a registration form that parents must fill out before a child enters the children's ministry area allows a church to ask many questions. One of them may be, "Does your child have any special needs we could know about so that we can make children's ministry more successful for your child?" Giving parents the option to answer this question at least once a year allows for the discovery of new information about the child should they choose to disclose it.

As peers begin to notice some areas of difference, explain that God created each one of us differently and has different jobs for each of us to accomplish. In conjunction with parents, consider giving the peers accurate information about their friend so they can best understand and interpret words, equipment, actions, and behaviors.

Elementary age example from an effective, inclusive church

As Grace Church discovers a child who has an area of disability, the coordinator interviews parents to learn more about that child. From that place, they put together a plan for the child. All plans include some time with typical peers, but the pieces of the plan are flexible to best surround the child's needs and gifts. One child may spend the entire time with peers. Another may have an assigned buddy for that environment. Still other children may spend a portion of time with peers and some adapted pieces of curriculum and also spend time in a quiet, less-stimulating area with another adult who may use alternate materials to communicate a biblical truth. There are many options at Grace Church, but the individual plan for the child dictates the environment and tools that will be used.

Tips and ideas for middle and high school youth While all of the same considerations are true for this age group (get to know the individual, and modify environment, curriculum, and activities as needed), this is an important time to think along with the individual.

Advanced planning is the key to success with this age group. Many times there are church-sponsored overnights, retreats, social events, and parties associated with the age group. It is critical to plan ahead when including a person with an area of disability. Think through the event and what might be needed to allow this individual to be included. Make sure you have all those pieces in place before heading out to the activity.

Building respectful, considerate, understanding, kind, helpful and receptive peers will launch students into a lifetime of practicing these qualities with others. While it is true for all age groups, peers will have incredible learning opportunities from their friend. Although some teens can earn a reputation for being more self-focused at this stage of life, the presence of a peer with a disability can turn into an opportunity to learn lifelong character traits. The opposite, however, can also be true. Taking the time to highlight the gifts of each individual and taking a strong stance against bullying or put-downs of any kind will be important.

Youth example from an effective, inclusive church

The youth group had planned a neighborhood scavenger hunt. The leader got together with Bradley, two friends, and his mom to plan for this event. The parent was willing to loan them their vehicle that would

accommodate Bradley's wheelchair as well as three additional friends. The leader decided all groups, therefore, would have four youth and one leader. This group had the advantage of knowing a bit about some of the more challenging items, and Bradley and his friends brainstormed some ideas before the event so that they would also have a chance to compete in this event in a fun and fair way.

Tips and ideas for adults

Worship services and other church activities that have accommodations in place for areas of difference will allow members to continue to participate throughout the years. The aging process allows us to affirm an important truth. We all might say, "I am temporarily able-bodied." Hearing loss, memory loss, strokes, vision changes, and weaker body parts will most likely have all of us one day in that category of 20% of persons with disabilities. In many cases, one will need to think specifically with an individual about how to ensure participation.

Provide support and social opportunities. Social opportunities are limited for some in this age group. The school years are often rich with gatherings and events. When some persons with disabilities get older, however, those opportunities may dramatically decrease. This is an excellent time to set up social support circles, equipping peers to come around an individual and be more purposefully a part of this individual's life. A good model for this circle of support can be found in the *G.L. U.E. Training Manual* by Kimberley S. Luurtsema and Barbara J. Newman and will give you all the tools needed for setting up support communities called "Glue Teams." For individuals with intellectual disabilities, Alzheimer's, or many other designations, this can be an important part of "being the church" together.

Adult example from an effective, inclusive church

Monique was part of a Thursday night event at her church. Using Friendship Ministry curriculum, she was paired with a friend from church as they attended this small group designated to support persons with intellectual disabilities as well as friendships with typical peers. Monique's parents had passed away several years ago, so her friend was one of five others within the church who would spend time with her each week. She would sit with one of these friends at church, and she would

also go to the movies, have dinner together, or play Frisbee golf at least once a week with a friend. Monique's birthday was a special time when this group all gathered to celebrate. They remembered one of her mother's last spoken requests: "Please don't forget her birthday." They don't!

Equipping the Team of Leaders, Volunteers, and Peers

Accurate and God-honoring information is one of the most important tools a church can have as part of becoming an effective and inclusive church. Consider, for example, the child who screams when there is a loud noise. It is important for peers to understand that her ears are very sensitive to loud noises, and it hurts her ears. Once armed with this information, they can be supportive and caring as opposed to scared or shocked. Accurate information equips a church. It also invites discussion. A well-loved pastor explained to the congregation that he was recently diagnosed with depression. He invited others to gather with him to learn more about that area. That important disclosure opened the doors for many others to come forward about friends and family members who were also impacted by depression. These discussions led to some training so that the congregation could better respond to this situation. The people you are currently including in your church community will give you the best starting point for education. It may be mental illness, autism spectrum disorder, physical challenges, or a general scriptural understanding of disability.

Safety in all churches is so important! Make sure all volunteers fill out applications and have a screening. Persons with disabilities can sometimes be targets for abuse, and the church is responsible for making sure this individual is safe and protected by following volunteer safeguards.

While it is important to equip your team "in general" about an area of disability or a scriptural perspective, the best way to equip volunteers and leaders will be to give them information about a specific individual. What will Jamie like and what are his strengths? What areas will be difficult for Jamie? What is the current plan for accommodations? What is the chain of command and to whom do I go when I need more ideas to try? Will he need help in the bathroom? Volunteers, once there is a written plan in place and

specific training in these areas, will often be eager to include and interact with Jamie.

Also, when recruiting volunteers, it is important to also be specific. Let people know exactly what you want them to do, how they will be involved, and that there will be training for them as part of the process. One of the most helpful persons to have in place is some kind of coordinator or lead person in the church who is a resource for all age groups in including persons with disabilities. This individual can help best understand that person, work as part of a team to put together an individualized plan, and also oversee the plan to suggest changes or give support. This person will be a key contact for each ministry leader or overseer as individuals are included throughout the community.

As you recruit, make sure you remind people that there is mutual blessing. While you are asking volunteers to sign up to be part of this opportunity, they can also expect to learn from and grow through interacting with this individual. It is a sharing of gifts and an opportunity to grow together in Christ. Recruiting also becomes more of a joy when paired with a reminder from Scripture about the importance of living out the sign on the door, “Everyone Welcome.”

You Are Not Alone

In addition to the many resources highlighted throughout this chapter, also look to the congregation members and community for suggestions and support. If a member of the congregation is a special educator, psychologist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, audiologist, or otherwise engaged in occupations that may already support persons with disabilities, ask those individuals to help you. If time does not permit them to be involved weekly, they may be willing to serve as consultants to this process.

The community may also have people who would be thrilled to support church efforts. The schools, universities, community mental health agencies, and other disability awareness groups might be willing to offer training and help in setting up plans for individuals. Public agencies often affirm the important role a church can play in the life of an individual. Look for partners in these people.

Conclusion

“Everyone Welcome.” Is this true in your church community? So often we have the idea that churches decide the content of the sign. The wording, however, is really not an invitation from the congregation. It is an invitation that is given by Jesus Christ, the head of the church. As He clearly extends His arms to all—inviting each one into a relationship with Himself and with His body—may we be ready to put into action the steps it will take to honor those words as they relate to persons with disabilities.

Discussion Questions

1. If the words “Everyone Welcome” were printed on the church you currently attend, what changes might you need to make in your church to make the sign accurate for persons with disabilities?
2. Think of someone you know who has some type of diagnosed area of disability. Instead of describing that area of difference, describe the gifts that person brings to your community or life.
3. In thinking of the ministry prepositions described in this chapter, give an example of “ministry to” persons with a disability and “ministry with or by” a person with a disability in a church setting.
4. In what ways might your conversation and church support differ when interacting with a parent whose child was diagnosed with a disability before birth, at birth, or after birth?
5. If your church were going to include a teen with an autism spectrum disorder in the youth group, outline the key principles and process you would use (remember to include the general key principles as well as the age-specific ideas and tips).
6. As it relates to the learning from this chapter, complete the following phrase, “I used to think _____, but now I think _____.”

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PART 4

Who Leads in Discipleship?



Chapter 19



SERVANT LEADERSHIP

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If a student was going to begin researching leadership, he or she may end up in a bookstore. To no one's surprise, the bookstore will have many books about leadership. One would find in the readings of these books that most are written from the author's view of leadership based on experiences of leadership. Many leadership books review the leadership of great leaders in the past such as presidents, CEOs of companies, and other leaders who were perceived as having great success in their careers or lives. Perhaps in ministry, leaders are identified as great leaders if their churches or ministries have experienced significant growth as perceived by others. Most of these books are based on the experiences of the leader and how the leader could use leadership skills to accomplish perceived success as defined by culture. These books, although valuable, are limited in the understanding of the study of leadership based on truth from Scripture or the truth found in the research in leadership.

The study of leadership is not a discipline in itself but a study across disciplines. A student of leadership can research leadership from many disciplines and fields of study.

The study of leadership is a new field of research. It has only been in the last eighty or so years that formal research has taken place in the field of

leadership. It is challenging to research leadership because leadership is complex. A researcher in this field must look not only at the leader and his or her characteristics, skills, or behaviors, but these also must be researched in the context of where the leader expresses these leadership behaviors.

The study of leadership is also an interdisciplinary study. It is not a discipline in itself but a study across disciplines. A student of leadership can research leadership from many disciplines and fields of study such as history, psychology, business, theology, and ministry. This creates another challenge for a student because one must review many disciplines and fields of study to understand the complete picture of leadership. The study of leadership is not unique to any one particular field, and so a serious student must enter many fields of study to get a full breadth of understanding.

The study of leadership is also about its practice. Just as one has a practice of medicine or law, a leader is also in the practice of leadership. One never truly arrives a leader without flaws or without the ability to learn more about leadership. When one finds himself or herself in leadership roles, the challenges of leading become very real. It is much easier to talk about leadership than it is to lead. In other words, the more you practice leadership the more you realize that leadership is never obtained but is always in process of becoming. A maturing leader is one who is willing to learn from mistakes and learn from truth in Scripture and truth found in the research of leadership.

This chapter will focus on how one can study leadership based on truth from Scripture and truth found in the research of leadership. Both are valuable in the study of leadership and important in preparation for ministry. This chapter is not an exhaustive study of leadership, but it is an overview that has emerged in the last century.

A ministry student in the area of leadership must start with an understanding that Scripture has significant truths that can guide a leader’s actions and attitudes. Reading about biblical characters such as Nehemiah, Job, Moses, Ruth, David, and Paul will help one understand how these leaders led in their contexts. A leadership student can pull from these biblical characters leadership principles and truths that can be applied in leadership contexts in today’s world. Reviewing the life of these leaders, one will see quickly that these leaders were human. They made good choices that might or might not have led to positive results depending on the situation. They were also human in that they made mistakes.

Scripture is very honest in revealing how decisions based on selfishness and sinfulness can lead to negative consequences. An example is the life of David in the Old Testament. David was considered to be a great leader by the people he led. He was said to have a “heart” for God and walked closely with God daily. However, we also see that this same leader failed by becoming self-absorbed. At key decision points in his life, he lost this “heart” for God. He made poor choices in his dealings with those he led. These poor decisions led to death and significant loss among those he was close to in his family and his followers. As a student in leadership, one can learn from the mistakes of leaders such as David, and one can learn how the Lord interacted with David as he acknowledged the mistakes he made as a leader. A student of leadership has much to learn by understanding the leadership principles gained in the lives of biblical leaders.

Another way to draw truths from Scripture about leadership is to examine verses that apply to leadership. A student of leadership can go to Psalms and Proverbs to draw truths that will guide the behavior and character of a leader. Great texts in Scripture such as the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount provide great truths that will guide a leader. Many leaders have found great comfort in Scripture when faced with challenging decisions or situations.

For Christ followers, the greatest example of a leader is found in the life of Jesus. He is exemplifies how a leader should lead. He sets the example for how a leader should treat others, including those who oppose him or her as a leader. The other interesting aspect of the life of Jesus is that His leadership led to His death. His leadership was and still is rejected by many, although He is considered in the Christian community as the greatest example of a leader. Understanding His leadership will help one recognize that leadership does not always end up in success as the world defines success. His success is characterized by words such as faithfulness, calling, obedience, humility, and servanthood. These words apply especially to the Christian message on leadership. A student of leadership, particularly someone who is studying leadership in ministry, will find that Jesus defines leadership differently than the world defines it. The standard of success in leadership has a different template in ministry than it does in the world. Writers have examined the life of Jesus to draw truths about leadership and have noted that it is not about being served as a leader but that Jesus’ way of leadership begins with an attitude of being a servant. Jesus is the true servant leader. He is the one who

exemplifies the meaning of leading with the heart of a servant. More will be said later in this chapter about the idea of servant leadership, and how this idea of leadership has emerged into the current study of leadership.

In the study of leadership, approaches are emerging that examine leadership traits, skills, and behaviors or style. The study becomes more complex by also researching the leader's interaction with followers and the context in which he or she is leading. Emerging approaches of research have developed theories such as trait, behavioral, and situational approaches to leadership. Furthermore, a significant study of leadership emerged with the development of transactional and transformational leadership theories. Finally, this chapter will give an overview of the study of servant leadership and how this description of leadership has emerged in both the secular and religious communities. At the close of the chapter, questions relating to ministry will be asked to encourage further exploration of the topic in ministry leadership.

Trait Approach

The research of leadership started with the examination of traits of great leaders.[433] Researchers in this area focused on common characteristics such as physical, emotional, intellectual, and social traits that emerged to describe the leader's practice of leadership. This body of research is called the "Great Man Theory" because the focus was entirely on the traits of the leader without examining the context or the leader's interaction with followers. The thinking during this period of research was to identify traits that could be applied to all situations of leadership. If these traits could be identified, then perhaps training could be developed to equip leaders to be most effective. The result of this research was varied and inconclusive. Traits that were found in one context perhaps could not be carried over to other contexts. For example, early research studied military leaders and eventually leaders in business. Researchers questioned how their findings could be applied to other kinds of organizations. Furthermore, an exhaustive list, based on research findings, could not be gathered that would give a full picture of what it means to be an effective leader.

However, what has emerged over the years of research are traits that perhaps are broad enough that can be applied to many contexts of leadership. The studies found that traits such as intelligence, sociability, and

perseverance seem to be consistent with effective leaders. Although a limited theory, it is important to know that traits are a key aspect in the understanding of leadership.

Behavioral Approach

Since the traits of a leader did not provide a complete way of understanding leadership, the research then moved into the study of the skills and behavior of a leader.[434] The research did not center so much on the traits or characteristics of a leader but examined what they do when leading. In this view, the leader had two different skill sets—working with people and getting a task accomplished. Through this research, the leader could develop to become both a task-oriented and people-oriented leader. The "one best way" approach emerged with writers and researchers such as Blake and Mouton, who developed the Managerial Grid. The Managerial Grid identified how a leader led depending on his or her concern for people or production. This Managerial Grid implied that it is best to lead when both the concern for people and concern for production are considered. Once a leader understands that he or she has strength in one skill set, the other skill can be developed. In other words, if a leader has strengths in production, then perhaps the leader needs further development and training in working with people. The goal is for the leader to develop skill sets and behaviors to work with both people and tasks.

As the research emerged, it became apparent that leaders in the same field could be effective although they led very differently. The body of research began to focus on the style of leadership. In the sports arena, leaders such as Tom Landry and Tony Dungy led with skills and style that were less charismatic in their approach. Other coaches, such as Vince Lombardi and Jimmy Johnson, were more animated and flamboyant in their approach to coaching. Based on the perception of those in the coaching field, all of these coaches were successful, and yet they used a skill set and leadership style different from one another.

Situational Approach

With the emergence of situational leadership, the focus of the research moved from just looking at the leader's traits, skills, or style but also examining the context in which the leader is leading. Researchers began to

explore the characteristics of situations and their relationship to leadership effectiveness by suggesting that leaders arise out of or adjust to situations rather than simply possessing specific traits or behaviors making them different from their followers. As a result of this shift in the study of leadership, situational leadership theories emerged, which basically stated that a leader must have the ability to adapt according to the leadership situation. An effective leader knows how to read the situation and adapt his or her leadership style to meet the demands of the situation. So effective leadership originates from a combination of leader characteristics and situational circumstances.

Essentially, situational leadership, like the behavioral leadership theories, is based on two dynamics: task versus relationship. However, situational leadership theories move one step further to suggest that the setting in which the leader finds himself impacts the leader's behavior, causing him to adjust his behavior depending on the personal and professional maturity of the follower and the specific situational variables presented. Thus, depending on the combination of the follower's maturity level and the situational variables, the leader's behavior will either be "Telling" (high task, low relationship), "Selling" (high task, high relationship), "Participating" (low task, high relationship), or "Delegating" (low task, low relationship).[435]

Contingency Approach

Similar to the situational approach, contingency theory is a synthesis of the trait approach and situational theory. It seeks to determine the situational variables that are mediating the interaction between the leadership behavior and the situations resulting in effectiveness or "situational favorableness." Contingency theory posits that the appropriate style of leadership is contingent on the requirements of the particular situation. Therefore, leader behavior is contingent on the situation.

Fiedler championed this leadership theory as he implemented a model to assess particular leadership "traits" by measuring the "least preferred coworker" (LPC). The higher the leader rated the group member whom he or she liked least, the higher the leader's LPC score. A high LPC score was equivalent to a more socially oriented leader while a low LPC score was equivalent to a more task-oriented leader.

Another contingency leadership model is the path-goal theory, which suggests that a leader can affect the performance, satisfaction, and motivation of a follower or group of followers by offering rewards for achieving performance goals and clarifying paths toward these goals. This can be done by espousing one of three leadership styles—directive leadership, supportive leadership, or participative leadership—depending on the particular situation.

The normative decision-making model is also a contingency leadership approach. In this model the leader can choose to be autocratic, consultative, or group-oriented when making decisions. Autocratic involves unilateral decision making by the leader with little to no follower information. Consultative decision making involves the leader interacting with individual followers or groups of followers to obtain information to make a decision. Group-oriented decision making involves the leader interacting with individuals or groups of followers in such a way that the group considers the information and makes a decision. Inconsistent empirical data, theoretical criticism, and dissipation in the contingency theoretical movement brought about no specific situational characteristics or leadership abilities definitively related to leader effectiveness.[436]

In ministry, we have heard statements such as that the pastor was not a good "match" for the church. The description suggests that perhaps the pastor had been effective in his previous church but is not effective in his current church because the context is different. Contingency theory is an attempt not only to examine the leader but also to examine the leader in the context in which he or she is leading. The research focused on "matching up" the skills of a leader to the right context. According to this theory, when a leader is matched up to the organization that is similar in style and approach, then effectiveness is much more likely in that context. The challenge in this research is to make sure the leader and the organization "match."

Transactional and Transformational Approaches

In the 1970s, James MacGregor Burns and Bernard Bass began to research how leaders specifically interacted with followers. Interactions seemed to emerge that were either transactional or transformational. Initially, the writers in this field approached these two leadership theories as mutually

exclusive, but as this field of research continued, a continuum of leadership emerged where leaders use varying levels of transactional and transformational leadership attributes to promote effectiveness.

Transactional leadership theory views the leader-subordinate relationship as a series of transactions or exchanges through the leader's use of contingent rewards. In order to achieve overall organizational performance, the leader exchanges or leverages punishment and rewards for follower compliance and effort. Bass extended Burn's definition of transactional leadership to further describe the supervisor-subordinate relationship by characterizing it as the use of contingent rewards, passive management-by-exception, and active management-by-exception.

Contingent rewards involve a positive or negative exchange between the leader and the follower based on the follower's compliance, or lack of compliance, with the leader's order. Contingent rewards is based on the ability of the transactional leader to use coercive power over the follower to accomplish goals. Although this component of transactional leadership can achieve some success, it is typically not long term and is considered to be substandard to the effects of transformational leadership.

Active management-by-exception involves leaders monitoring follower performance in such a way as to only avoid mistakes by the follower. The leader provides correction only if the follower deviates from the leader's desired level of performance of the follower. Passive management-by-exception involves leaders who are "hands-off" with their followers until a serious deviation or problem arises. Passive and active management-by-exception both use varying degrees of coercive power by the leader to monitor and correct follower compliance and performance. Both of these transactional leadership attributes are even less effective than the use of contingent rewards.[437]

In contrast to transactional leadership, Burns[438] first introduced transforming leadership theory, which was conceived to be the complete opposite of transactional leadership. Transforming leadership "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality."[439] Transforming leadership is moral as it transforms both the leader and the follower by raising their performance and expectations. Burns considered transforming leadership to be intellectual, reforming, revolutionary, heroic, and ideological.

Bass[440] later added to Burns's concept and renamed it transformational leadership. According to Bass, transformational leadership provides vision, charisma, and empowerment to followers through the use of idealized influence (attributed/behavior), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to elevate the followers, and the leader, to higher levels of performance and achievement. Idealized influence involves "leaders [who] display conviction; emphasize trust; take stands on difficult issues; present their most important values; and emphasize the importance of purpose, commitment, and the ethical consequences of decision. Such leaders are admired as role models; they generate pride, loyalty, confidence, and alignment around a shared purpose." Individualized consideration involves "leaders [who] deal with others as individuals; consider their individual needs, abilities and aspirations; listen attentively; further their development; advise; teach; and coach." Inspirational motivation involves "leaders articulat[ing] an appealing vision of the future, challeng[ing] followers with high standards, talk[ing] optimistically and with enthusiasm, and provid[ing] encouragement and meaning for what needs to be done." Intellectual stimulation involves "leaders [who] question old assumptions, traditions, and beliefs; stimulate in others new perspectives and ways of doing things; and encourage the expression of ideas and reasons."[441] Unlike Burns, Bass did not view transactional and transformational processes as mutually exclusive. Bass believed a leader may interchangeably or simultaneously be transactional and transformational depending on different circumstances and situations, which has been confirmed by various research studies.[442]

Servant Leadership

In the secular community, Robert Greenleaf[443] is credited with coining the term "servant leadership." His understanding and writings of leadership emerged in the 1960s during a time in American history where there was great turmoil. Many in America were questioning authority, including educational and business institutions. Robert Greenleaf emerged on the scene to introduce to the business and education communities the idea that leadership is about being a servant. He was impressed with the book *Journey to the East*,[444] where the person who was perceived to be the servant of the group was really the leader of the group. This led him to think that a leader is

not one who is served, but rather is a servant to the organization of which he or she is a part.

Larry Spears[445] wrote a book discussing the ten themes that identify Greenleaf's understanding of servant leadership:

- Listening
- Empathy
- Healing
- Awareness
- Persuasion
- Conceptualization
- Foresight
- Stewardship
- Commitment to the growth of people
- Building community

In our years of teaching, we have observed that students at times confuse Robert Greenleaf's understanding of servant leadership as a biblical model of leadership. Greenleaf did not start with Scripture to develop his understanding of servant leadership. He approached the idea of servant leadership within the context of a secular business community. He may or may not have been influenced by his faith, through the Quaker tradition, but we do know that he never claimed to start with Scripture to identify the truths of his understanding of servant leadership. Greenleaf did have significant influence as a consultant on religious institutions such as churches and seminaries. He also consulted with denominations on how to be a servant leader organizationally to the churches it served. Greenleaf was involved in other non-profit organizations serving people, such as hospitals. His goal was not a theological development of servant leadership. Rather his goal was to help organizations understand how they can be servant leaders to those they serve. To this day, his writings have influence on leaders in the religious community as they attempt to be servants to those they lead.

Several researchers associated with Regent University are attempting to develop a research-based servant leadership model.[446] The focus of their research is on the Beatitudes and the fruit of the Spirit, and how these truths are applied to the interaction of the leader with the follower. They are studying how servant leadership reciprocally interacts between the leader and the follower. The research model is interdependent, with both the leader

and follower influencing one another. The main criticism is that the model does not distinguish itself from being a transformational model of a leader. The researchers argue that transformational leadership relates to the transformation of the organization while the focus of servant leadership relates to the individual interaction of the leader and follower. This is relatively new research in the field.

In our years of teaching, we have observed that students at times confuse Robert Greenleaf's understanding of servant leadership as a biblical model of leadership. Greenleaf did not start with Scripture to develop his understanding of servant leadership. He approached the idea of servant leadership within the context of a secular business community.

Recall that Jesus demonstrated what a true servant leader is. Jesus, all powerful, divine, and without sin, led by being a servant. He took the towel and a basin and did a task that was designated for a servant by washing the feet of the one whom He led. He demonstrated in a concrete way that leadership is not about being served but is about serving those you lead. Jesus also talked about not leading as the current leaders led but to lead as a servant. Although Jesus did not use the term "servant leadership," he demonstrated in a perfect way what it means to be a servant leader. His life was the definition of a servant leader. Wilkes, in his work on servant leadership, examined Jesus as the perfect example of a servant leader. Wilkes developed seven truths that emerged from studying Jesus' way of leading. Wilkes[447] determined that servant leaders:

Although Jesus did not use the term servant leadership, He demonstrated in a perfect way what it means to be a servant leader.

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1. humble themselves and wait for God to exalt them,
2. follow Jesus rather than seek a position,
3. give up personal rights to find greatness in service to others,
4. risk serving others because they trust that God is in control of their lives,
5. take up Jesus' towel of servanthood to meet the needs of others,
6. share their responsibility and authority with others to meet a greater need, and
7. multiply their leadership by empowering others to lead.

Summary

This chapter reveals that leadership can be studied and understood in a variety of ways depending on the perspective of the individual. It also reveals that servant leadership is a significant part of the ongoing discussion in contemporary leadership thought and study. It is our hope that in your personal leadership paradigm you will incorporate servant leadership that is informed by the truth found in the leadership research and the truth from Scripture.

Discussion Questions

1. What leadership traits from Scripture are identified for the practice of leadership in ministry? How are these traits applicable to leadership in ministry?
2. Do leadership traits identified in the research of leadership apply to leadership in ministry? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. What "people" skills are needed to be an effective leader in ministry? List and explain.
4. What "task" skills are needed to be an effective leader in ministry? List and explain.
5. Identify biblical leaders who had "people" and "task" skills. How were these skills used in leadership in ministry?
6. Can leaders in ministry lead the same in all situations? If yes, why? If not, why not?
7. Are aspects of transactional leadership used in ministry? If so, how are these used? What are the dangers of using aspects transactional leader in ministry? List and explain.
8. In what ways is transformational leadership attractive as a leadership approach in ministry? What are some dangers in the application of transformational leadership to ministry? List and explain why these are dangers.
9. How could servant leadership be demonstrated in ministry? In what ways is this way of leading different from the "top-down" approach to leadership?

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Chapter 20



DEVELOPING LAY LEADERS FOR A NEW CENTURY

Judy Morris, D. EdMin.

My home church, a small country church, did not have Sunday School. When I was in seminary, Dr. Bernie Spooner's teaching in the Introduction to Christian Education class ignited a spark that had long been in my heart, but was dormant for lack of the knowledge and skills to take action and lead my home church to begin Sunday School. While in seminary, I traveled 160 miles on weekends to lead my home church to begin a Sunday School program for the first time since its beginning in 1899. Today, Campground Baptist Church in Alto, Texas, continues to have a growing and viable Sunday School program, even adding classes for preschool/children, youth/college, and adults. As I stated in an article I wrote about this experience, "never could I take the credit for what happened at Campground; many others gave their talents and lives to be used of God…to help bring about the renewal of interest in starting and maintaining a Bible study program."[448]

Lay Leadership in the Traditional Church

These "many others," as we know them today, are called "lay leaders." The Campground example is certainly that of a "traditional church." By that I mean it is a church that best fits the description of a "traditional church" as described by Dr. Terry Bertrand, associate pastor of administration at First Baptist Church, Arlington, Texas:

> The traditional church typically has a more traditional style of worship music. The manner in which it is organized will often follow the more historical pattern as practiced by their respective denomination. Decisions are made by the will of the congregation or the hierarchical system set in place for that purpose. Many of the more traditional churches tend to want to relate to other churches through a denominational relationship.[449]

What about lay leadership in the "traditional church" as defined above? Is the process of discovering, enlisting, training, deploying, evaluating, and celebrating lay leaders the same in the "traditional church" as it is in the "emerging" church? As we contemplate this question, consider what Bertrand has to say regarding the "emerging" church:

> The emerging church most often adheres to a very contemporary style of music for its worship practice. Their organization is typically developed by its pastor and decisions are made by a select few who typically make up an elder board or leadership team. Emerging churches tend to relate to other congregations through associations rather than denominations. One word to describe the emerging church is that it is "decentralized." [450]

Bertrand further concludes:

> It is important to note that a traditional church and an emerging church can both represent many of the mainline denominational expressions of Christianity. The thing that separates them is often determined by how they are organized, how they make decisions, how they worship, and how they relate to other bodies of believers.[451]

The Emergent and the Traditional Church

The chart "Emergent and Traditional Church Comparisons" prepared by Dr. Bobby Martin, the director of leadership development for the Dallas Baptist Association, Dallas, Texas, provides an opportunity for a conversation and comparison of the emergent church and the traditional church based on

research and author observations. It is not a definitive list or a conclusive statement on either style of church. The traditional church has embraced many methods and numerous ministries to meet the needs of people and to have a message for a generation of people. Time, historical events, the American culture, and the American educational system have impacted and changed people. As a result, the emergent church has adapted to the circumstances and changed its approach to be more relevant in the current situation and with the new generation. Even though there are bold differences between the two, leaders in each group would indicate their main purpose is proclaiming the gospel and making disciples.

Emergent and Traditional Church Comparisons

Area	Emergent Church	Traditional Church
General		
Philosophy	Post-modern[1]	Modern[1]
Outlook	Looking forward	Looking backward
Structure	Decentralized[2]	Centralized
Church ministries	Simple and basic	Broad and fully developed
Culture dynamics	Engage the culture[1]	Change the culture
Approach	Communal[1]; army of many	Individualistic[1]; army of one
Evangelism		
Message	Some leaders would express "ambivalence about who is in and who is out"[3]	Jesus is the only way
Method	Show your faith by works	Share your faith with words
Christian presentation	Loving attitude[1]	Logical arguments[1]
Mission engagement	I participate in missions: missional[2]	I send missionaries: they go, I stay
Worship		
Planning	Holistic	Disconnected
Experience	Sensory[2]	Cerebral
Music	Contemporary music	Hymns
Instruments	Electrical and digital	Air, wind, strings
Teaching		
Doctrine	Plural understanding of truth[4]	Propositional truth[2]
Theology	Storied narrative[2] (tell the story)[1]	Systematic theology[2] (explain the principle)
Rhetoric	Provocative and focused on the need for change[2]	Stay the course
Social view	Focus on social justice in the nation[2]	Focus on spiritual condition of the nation
Learning		
Learning styles	Experiential[1]	Linear/logical[1]
Learning domains	Affective[1]/application	Cognitive[1]/application
Priorities of learning	Focus on right relationships[1]	Focus on right beliefs[1]
Learning outcome	How a person lives[1]	What a person believes

[1]http://www.theopedia.com/Emerging_Church
[2]http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html
[3]http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html?start=5
[4]http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=20420

Lay Leadership in the Emerging Church

How does one discover, enlist, train, deploy, evaluate, and celebrate lay leaders in traditional and emerging churches? Is the process the same in both? Is it different? What difference does it make related to your church?

Three churches' websites were consulted in search of the answers to these questions. The information presented next outlines some of the steps taken by each church in the lay leader development process.

In carefully considering the website for Lake Pointe Church in Rockwall, Texas, one clearly learns from first look what the church believes, the eight-step process of assimilation, and their key structures for disciple-making.

Lake Pointe Church (Rockwall, Texas) Process of Assimilation and Key Structures for Disciple-Making

Lake Pointe 8-Step	**Lake Pointe Key Structures for Disciple-Making**
Curious 1. Build relationships with the unchurched 2. Share a verbal witness *Convinced* 3. Invite to Lake Pointe Church 4. Worship God 5. Participate in a small group *Contagious Contributor* 6. Serve 7. Give 8. Reach and develop others[452]	We believe that a fully developing follower of Christ: • Worships God—both corporately in a large gathering and privately along with God • Lives by God's Word—understands the Bible as the authority for all areas of life • Contributes to God's Work—discovers and develops their gifts and abilities to serve the Body through the contribution of time, financial support, and relational influence • Impacts God's World—reaching out first to lost and unchurched friends by praying, giving a verbal witness, and inviting them to Lake Pointe events, and becoming personally involved in world missions • Walks with God's People—is involved in, and does life with, a small group of fellow believers

The second church website reviewed was First Baptist Church, Amarillo, Texas. As one of the main points of "What We Believe," there is a line that says: "Believers are priests before God, but we are called to Christian community in the body of Christ."[453] Additionally, First Baptist Church Amarillo has a page on the website entitled "Volunteers @ FBC." On this page the following statement is made that is relevant to our topic: "Volunteering is not just about helping others. What you'll find out when you volunteer is that serving others is also the best way to grow in your relationship with God."[454]

The third church website reviewed was the online presence of University Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas. Even from the website, one is immediately aware of the great importance placed on the lay members of the church. “Lay Leaders” is listed with the staff segments of the website. For example, in the list of “Get to Know Us” are the following: Message from the senior pastor, pastoral staff, music staff, business staff, facilities staff, and *lay leaders*. These are each live links on the website that take you to the respective web page sections. A click on “Lay Leaders” takes the inquirer to a page entitled “Our Lay Leaders.” Included here are sections listing names of lay leaders serving in the following areas:

- Administrative Council
- Staff Parish Relations
- Finance
- Nominations
- UPUMC Foundation

Finally, after the listing of all involved in these lay leader areas of the church for the next three years, is the following bold announcement: “Lay Members to Annual Conference 2011.” After this the names of five lay leaders chosen to attend the conference for 2011 are listed. The importance placed on the lay leadership of University Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas, is obvious from first glance, and it is indicative of the support from the pastor and other paid staff members, as well as the financial support provided by the church. It is a good model worth consideration.[455]

Why Lay Leadership in the First Place?

Urgent need. It has been said that church workers are the most blessed people in the church and community. Not only are they learning more than others who come to church, but they also are developing themselves while doing the most important work in the world.[456]

As church leaders, we must place priority on discovering, equipping, and deploying the laity for personal ministry through the church. The long-term results of the pastor’s or other top church leader’s leadership lie in the workers discovered who are serving as leaders even after the pastor or church leader leaves his current assignment. The need is certainly urgent to discover and develop lay leaders in the local church who will join pastors

and church leaders in growing believers into disciple-making teachers. The sad reality of the situation, as described by Sue Mallory in *The Equipping Church Guidebook,* is that

> The church is one of the few, if not the only, nonprofit organizations that do not require training for service in the leadership. Churches tend to assume that people of faith will automatically have the kind of commitment, skill, and experience to carry out whatever is asked of them.[457]

Biblical foundation. The reality is that the need for lay leaders is, indeed, urgent in both the traditional church and the emerging church. The approach may be different related to lay leader development, but lay leaders are critical to the life and ministry of the church.

First Corinthians 12:6–10 indicates that all Christians are to use their gifts. Therefore, every believer in the church is a candidate for serving in the ministry of the church. All members have been gifted in one or more special abilities of service. Church leaders must lead them to discover their gifts and help match them to areas of need in the church.

We, as church leaders, often consider Ephesians 2:10 ("We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do," NIV84) as the foundation for the principle we use to motivate church members to serve. Leaders who recognize these teachings and communicate them to their congregations will find a greater level of motivation for service in the church. We each need to understand that service in the church is a call from God, whether the call is to serve as a lay person or vocational minister. This principle is applied in that leaders and potential leaders should seek the will of God in relationship with all members of the church as each seeks to know His will through prayer.

Ephesians 4:12–13 reminds us that we are to be measured by "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (NIV84). Jesus Christ set the example by which we are measured in our service to Him. This means our service should be rendered as if we are making a sacrifice to Him. He deserves our best. When workers are enlisted with this understanding, the local church is being developed on a solid foundation and will produce fruit worthy of our Lord.

Note carefully that people who serve in Christian ministry must meet very high standards. Jesus Christ is our example! We must be the best leaders and Christians we can be. Moral character that is above reproach is very important. Others need to see and know that our faith makes a difference in our personal lives. Our commitment must show without question that Jesus Christ is the one we serve and no other. We *teach.* Therefore we must *do* what we are teaching.

Christian leadership must encompass the ability to lead, the ability to follow, the wisdom to know the difference, and the occasions when each is appropriate. Good followers make good leaders. Each leader in the church, including the pastor, must be willing to follow. We must reflect on the fact that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Therefore, consideration must be given to the concept of *servant leadership* within the church. Each of us is serving in the areas of service to which God has called us. In the true sense, we serve Him as we serve each other.

Where Do You Find Lay Leaders?

Identify. The first step in finding lay leaders is to identify those who may potentially be interested in serving in some capacity in the church as a leader. How do we make these identifications? Consider the following questions.

- Who are the members of the church?
- How does a person become a member?
- If a person indicates he or she wants to join the church, what happens between that time and the time they officially join?
- What are the membership requirements? Are they relevant? Why do they exist?
- Are church members held accountable in any way to the membership covenants of the church?

These questions are important as church leaders begin to establish a plan for developing lay leaders in the church. Leaders are often surprised to learn the number of church members on the church roll compared to the number of church members who actually attend church. The gap is typically rather large. In addition, when the number of members who attend on a fairly

regular basis is compared to the number who are actually involved in some ministry as a leader, the gap still remains.

Why do church leaders need to ask all of the above questions? Why not just begin by identifying church members vs. active church members? By asking all of the questions, leaders are forced to face certain realities and needs about the church that should be addressed before an enlistment process begins. For example, it is doubtful that many (even some of the paid church staff members) will know the answers to the questions. Yet, finding the answers will provide information that is important as individuals are identified as potential leaders. Often, working through this process leads church leaders to discover systems, membership classes, and other processes that are either weak or do not exist but are needed to best assimilate an individual into the church as an active, informed, growing, and serving Christian.

Where do you find lay leaders for your church? Find out who are the members of your church. Remember, this is a process, and it will not happen quickly. An intentional effort and commitment to contact active and nonactive members is a long and lengthy effort but one that is worthwhile. However, while the efforts are underway contacting those who are not active members, leaders can certainly begin to identify current active members of the church who have shown the potential to become lay leaders. It is from this group of individuals that church leaders should begin the enlistment process.

Enlist. A student in the Developing Lay Leaders class at Dallas Baptist University developed a paper outlining the enlistment process that he and the leaders of his church use for ministry teams and church volunteer leaders. The steps are:

1. Pray for God’s leadership.
2. Make an appointment to meet face-to-face with the potential leader.
3. Interview the person and seek the person’s commitment to the mission of the church.
4. Emphasize how the ministry purpose supports the mission and values of the church.
5. Discuss his/her passion and gifts and affirm that his/her gifts are needed for the ministry.
6. Present the ministry position and share details of the job description.
7. Share resources and curriculum to be used in this ministry position.

8. Tell about training opportunities with specific dates.
9. Share the time investment and work required for the ministry with specific dates for annual planning and monthly/regular coordination.
10. Share the high standards for team members.
11. Allow time for prayerful consideration
12. Set a time to check back with member.
13. Make a second contact with the member and seek commitment.[458]

This student continued in his paper to explain:

> Recently I boarded an airplane bound for home and was greeted by an announcement from the pilot who stated that we were going to be delayed while they searched for a co-pilot. In jest a passenger across the aisle from me said, "Why don't you do it?" I explained that I wasn't trained or prepared to fly an airplane and would not stay on board if they allowed untrained, unprepared people in the cockpit. Seriously none of us, I believe, would trust our life to a pilot, a doctor, or anyone unprepared to care for us. Wherever we go, we expect that people who serve us will be well trained and prepared to do their best. So why should we expect anything less from our ministry leaders in our church?[459]

The information shared by this student is relevant and realistic for any church facing the enlistment of lay leaders. However, every church is different and will need to develop its own enlistment process based on church policy and faith tradition. Some churches function through committees, and others utilize teams, while some leave the enlistment of leaders to church staff members or Sunday School leaders. However, enlistment must become a commitment on the part of every person in the Bible-teaching area of the church. Consider the following basic principles for enlisting people to teach the Bible in the church:

Pray for God to provide. Perhaps the lack of adequate lay members who are willing to become leaders in the church is a result of the lack of prayer. Jesus told His disciples, "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:30, NASB). Prayer efforts for identifying and enlisting leaders must be a churchwide effort, not just that of the church staff members or the current lay leaders of the church. As prayers

are voiced to the Father regarding enlistment, we should never fail to ask the Lord to bring those individuals to mind and to prepare their hearts and minds as well.

Visit lay members personally. Announcements made in worship services typically yield no volunteers or, at best, volunteers who may not be a good fit for the ministry need. A personal visit (as explained above), investing the time and effort to follow the important steps, and a time of prayer with the individual are all vital elements in enlistment.

Ask for a commitment. Church leaders should never approach enlistment out of crisis or desperation. Rather, potential leaders should be asked for a commitment to a task that is high and worthwhile—that of teaching the Bible, which is realistically an investment in kingdom work, work of eternal consequences. It is so important not to take this lightly but to approach it seriously with a job description or at the very least a list of expectations such as planning meetings and training events they will be asked to attend.

Focus on the importance of Bible teaching. As you talk to potential leaders, it is so important that they hear your heart and begin to personally grasp the vital role of the Bible-teaching arm of the church. It is, after all, so important to the life of the church, for the glory of God, for the salvation of others, and for the advancement of God's kingdom. When they realize this, they will want to be involved in service.

Begin by determining spiritual gifts. Taking the time to lead potential lay leaders through a spiritual gifts inventory is very worthwhile. Not only will this help church leaders identify those gifted in the area of teaching, but it also will help church members discover things about themselves that will serve to motivate and encourage them to become involved.

Engage current lay leaders to enlist and train future lay leaders. Church members serving in teaching and other leadership roles are often the very best source for identifying others who would be good future teachers and leaders. Through conversations over coffee, shared meals away from the church, and even in the church classrooms, teachers and leaders discover individuals who have genuine interests, abilities, and caring hearts to invest in the lives of others as lay leaders. Current leaders should be challenged to enlist others and be willing to train them.

How Do You Equip Lay Leaders?

The task of the local church is far too important to not invest in equipping lay leaders. Without training, the number of potential leaders will decrease. When people are asked to serve, they are more willing to respond positively if they know they will be equipped with training, resources, and support.

Train and deploy. Church leaders should never begin an enlistment process with an individual without a training plan in place. When leaders meet with a prospective teacher, there should be an unapologetic expectation that they will participate in training. In fact, this should be a part of the job description. This expectation, communicated at the time of enlistment, lets the individual know the importance placed on the job he or she is being asked to do—teaching God's word, serving God and His people.

Mentoring potential teachers and leaders is keenly important. Lasting impressions are made when teachers and leaders take the time to sit down with future teachers and leaders and explain how they develop a lesson or prepare and implement some aspect of ministry. In addition, teachers and leaders should then allow the volunteers to actually teach or minister personally while lending support, encouragement, and feedback. The partnership between an experienced teacher or minister with a new lay volunteer is priceless!

How can laypeople be equipped to teach? A church must make training a priority, not just once a year but as an ongoing process.

Even with effective mentoring and training prior to deployment into individual lay leader assignments, individuals need and want continuing education opportunities to learn new ideas and techniques, as well as gain information about new resources. Often churches have regular lay leader meetings once a week or once each month. In addition to these regular training and planning meetings, churches often schedule special training events that happen once a quarter or once a year when guest speakers or age-group leaders from the association, state, or denominational levels lead age-group conferences.

Motivate. Teaching is so important to the life of the local church. The teacher in the class is God's servant whose commitment to Him influences the lives of others. Thus priceless contributions are made in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19–20, NASB).

Dr. Lawrence Klempnauer, retired Christian educator, was one of my mentors. I worked with him for almost thirty years as his education assistant at Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and later at Southwestern Seminary. When called on to lead conferences, he often used the poem "Sitting By the Fire" to motivate conference participants to serve in the church rather than living a life of complacency, which he referred to as "sitting by the fire."

Sitting By the Fire

He wasn't much for stirring about: It wasn't his desire.
No matter what the others did, He was sitting by the fire.
Same old story day by day: He never seemed to tire.
While others worked to build their church, He was sitting by the fire.
At last he died as all must do: They said he went up higher.
But if he is doing what he used to do, He is sitting by the fire.[460]

Evaluate. Evaluation relative to ministry can be defined as measuring the results of the ministry. Evaluation occurs when lay leaders and ministers engage in reflection on ministry experiences and ask questions to assess the effectiveness of people and programs.

Evaluation of lay leadership in the church occurs at two levels: program and person (lay leader). For the purpose of this chapter, we will focus on the evaluation or assessment of lay leaders (on the person level). Ministry leaders should use some type of assessment or evaluation instrument to guide the discussions with lay leaders relative to their strengths and challenges or weaknesses. Having such a resource completed by the lay leader affords one the opportunity to assess whether the person is serving in the right capacity or whether prayer and discussions are needed with the individual about serving in another capacity that more closely matches the person's spiritual giftedness. The meeting between the minister and the lay person in the church should be serious. It must be handled carefully and as positively as possible. Special thought should be given to having a group of lay leaders meet together for discussion and evaluation. The group should

spend time in discussion and reflection as to how the individuals see themselves serving in capacities that either match or do not match their giftedness. Self-discovery on the part of the participant regarding giftedness and service is the ideal. It is always so much better than ministry leaders pointing it out to them.

Whether in a group setting or on an individual basis, it is important for your evaluation session to become "ministry." Sue Mallory gives insight into the interview and evaluation process in *The Equipping Ministry Guidebook* in this statement: "An interview becomes ministry when it is an intentional conversation of the head and heart that 1) shares the person's personal journey, 2) affirms and celebrates, and 3) hears the person's stories—the highs, hopes, hurts, and healings."[461] It is out of this background and in this context that Christian ministers must approach all of their conversations (whether interviews or evaluations) with fellow lay leaders.

Encourage and affirm. Encouragement or affirmation can be described as valuing lay leaders for who they are, not for what they are doing in the church. It is ministry leaders taking the time to show genuine love and compassion to lift up lay leaders in the church. Affirmation can be described as gratitude for who we are as Christians. It is the reassurance that you as a minister provide to the lay leaders who carry out their ministry. Affirmation comes in the form of a comment, a smile, a word of welcome, or a thank you. It is not the same as recognizing a person for the job he or she is doing; it is the ongoing respect and acknowledgement of the person, for who the person is as a lay person involved in ministry. It is taking the time to let the lay leader know that he or she is important in the life of the church.

The Equipping Church Guidebook provides the following list of ways to affirm:

- Listen thoughtfully and respond.
- Call and ask about the ministry experience.
- Make a point of observing and offering feedback.
- Write a note of appreciation.
- Provide guidance, share an article, or invite to a lecture.
- Give a hug.
- Smile.
- Offer help and encouragement.
- Call by name.
- Introduce to others.

- Invite to a staff meeting.
- Ask the person to serve as a mentor or trainer.
- Recognize a disappointment.
- Have a cup of coffee together.
- Ask about the family, the job, the kids, the parents.
- Say thank you for just being you.
- Sit and talk together over a meal.
- Wait for the person and walk together down a hallway.
- Share a ride.
- Involve a person in a crisis situation.
- Keep candy on your desk.
- Remind a person about a pending meeting.
- Challenge a person to new heights.
- Respect sensitivities.
- Provide child care.
- Share a good joke or a story.
- Maintain a coffee bar complete with decaffeinated and herbal beverages.
- Allow for guilt-free sabbaticals from serving.
- Hold a reflection session or a Bible study.
- Call when a person is absent and express concern.[462]

What Is Priesthood of the Believer?

What does the Bible have to say about this? "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9, NASB).

Dr. Bill Pinson, longtime and respected Baptist leader, provides this summary of the priesthood of the believer:

> **What is a priest?** For one to say that a believer is a priest sounds strange to some. But from the Baptist perspective, all who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior are priests, believer priests. The concept of the priesthood of believers is basic for Baptists. As with some other beliefs important to Baptists, there are varying interpretations of what the concept means, but held in high regard is the biblical truth of the

> priesthood of believers. On the basis of various New Testament passages, Baptists have insisted that every person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ has access directly to God. Each is directly responsible to God. Each is to share the love of God.[463]

Dr. Pinson continues,

> **Priesthood of the Believer.** The priesthood of each believer is tied closely to another concept, that of soul competency. Each person has a God-given competence to know and follow God's will. A decision to follow Christ as Lord and Savior is an individual decision; no one can make it for another. Being a believer priest is a gift from God, not a human achievement; it comes with salvation.
>
> Each believer priest is responsible for his or her own actions. Individual believers can go directly to God without the aid of any intermediary… can and should read and interpret the Bible for themselves…Believer priests are all equal to one another in Christ (Galatians 3:26–28). There is only one High Priest, that is Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:23–8:13).[464]

Why are these concepts important to developing lay leaders? Dr. Pinson explains that the whole process of becoming a priest begins with having personal faith in Jesus Christ. With this faith, each believer is part of the body of Christ, which means that each believer is part of the local community of believers and should be in fellowship with others. The fellowship provides strength for each believer through encouragement and allows the believer to mature and grow. This fellowship of relationships aids in biblical interpretation. Through fellowship, believers learn from each other. Furthermore,

> Each believer priest in the fellowship is equal to all of the others. Therefore, no one is in authority over all. Thus decisions are made by the community of priests seeking to know the will of the head of the church, the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. They do this by prayer, Bible study, meditation, discussion and decision.[465]

“Priesthood of the believers” emphasizes community and fellowship. This biblical concept implies the importance of helping *all* members or “priests” in the church become servant leaders within the church body, in the community, and beyond.

How do we express appreciation and recognize the sacrifices lay leaders make? Recognizing and celebrating the service of lay leaders is important in the life of the church. Key ministry leaders must be trained and encouraged to watch for and recognize the service of others to the church. Consideration should be given to plan events that celebrate contributions and accomplishments of lay leaders at the end of service cycles in the church. Sometimes these are quarterly, sometimes yearly, or sometimes more often. The timing depends on the church calendar.

Lay members of the church who become leaders in certain ministries are strongly influenced regarding their return to service by whether they feel appreciated. Often people leave the church because they do not feel appreciated. No one took the time to say “thank you for your work” on behalf of the congregation. Recognition of service is a key component in retention of church members who are willing to serve.

Celebration services and recognition of lay leaders must be a part of the annual planning for the church calendar. These events should include the pastor, church staff, and other key leaders in the church. Recognition is more than just saying “thank you.” It is personal to the lay leader. It recognizes their unique contribution to the church. It is a way of saying “we value you.” It is also a way of making their service visible to the church as a whole and supporting them through the church. It is important to every volunteer, no matter the position. Whether the recognition is for setting up facilities for an event or for conducting a big program such as Vacation Bible School or weekly Bible study, recognition is important! It promotes personal and organizational growth and continued participation of individuals. It also is key to bringing unity to the church and is one of the key components of retaining leaders.

The Equipping Church Guidebook offers these keys to effective service celebrations:

1. Be timely—immediately upon service.
2. Be consistent among ministries and lay leaders.
3. Keep your plans manageable.
4. Be sincere, honest, and genuine.

5. Be user oriented and age sensitive.
6. Keep good records—include everyone.
7. Be creative.
8. Have fun.[466]

In a section titled “I Love It!” the book *Disciple-Making Teachers* offers this tribute to teaching:

> I love teaching. I love the laughter, the tears, the moments when God breaks in and does something incredible. I love the moments of discovery in class as well as the hours of preparation before class… . I enjoy leading the discussion. I love the energy, the animation that fills me whenever I teach… I love it when the personal stories of those more mature in the faith cast a light on the trail for the rest of us… .I love seeing what happens when people really think, really learn… I love seeing people’s lives change. I love watching people grow up over time… What a joy to see them become passionate about serving God. We love to see their hearts as well as their checkbooks open for the cause of Christ… Teaching is about love. It is about loving the people in your group enough to skillfully help them learn the truth that will set them free… I love teaching. I hope that you love it, too.[467]

These words express my desire for you as a “teacher of teachers.” It is a calling worthy of high respect and admiration because you approach it with love and humility and in the sense of the spirit of our Lord. It is the true reason for recognition and celebration of you! To that end, it is my prayer that your love for your teachers will lead you to a future in ministry that is a blessing to you and to those you teach. There is no higher calling.

> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together… (Hebrews 10:23–25, NIV84).

Discussion Questions

1. How is a “traditional church” different from an “emerging church"?
2. Using the emergent and traditional church comparison chart, choose one item under each of these areas and explain your understanding of each.

Area	Emergent Church	Traditional Church
General		
Evangelism		
Worship		
Teaching		
Learning		

3. List the 8-Step Process for Assimilation in the Lake Pointe Church plan and share how you feel your own church can lead new persons through the eight steps.
4. Look at the suggestions given for finding prospective teachers and discuss how this is done or might be done in your church.
5. Review the process for enlisting workers and describe how you would delete or add to this list if you were enlisting a new worker. Why would you make the changes?
6. What is a priest and what is meant by the “priesthood of all believers?”
7. What do you think you or your church leaders could do to improve the motivation of those serving in your church?

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Chapter 21



MENTORING STAFF AND KEY LAY LEADERS

Jeter Basden, Ed.D.

"In life we must be willing to coach and be coached; either one alone will leave us empty."[468] This statement in the book and movie *Golf's Sacred Journey* is indeed true about more than golf.

Ministers have a God-given responsibility to mentor others. The minister's assignment is "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:12, NIV84). Ministers are to spend their energies mentoring church members and fellow ministers to equip them to use their spiritual gifts for God's kingdom. This mentoring role is an essential part of the minister's duty and assignment and a non-negotiable aspect of the minister's life and ministry.

Ministers also need mentors—coaches, encouragers, advisers, accountability partners—in their lives. Most persons readily accept helpers in many areas of their lives—physical health, mental and emotional health, financial health, family health, legal assistance—to name a few. It is equally important for ministers to have mentors in their professional life of ministry so that they may develop fully into the persons and ministers God has called them to be.

This chapter focuses on the minister as a mentor and on the mentor for the minister. Both aspects are crucial for one's fulfillment as David Cook, author of the book *Golf's Sacred Journey,* quoted in paragraph one, noted. Both are essential also for the health of ministers and for the vitality of the church.

Ministers also need mentors—coaches, encouragers, advisers, accountability partners—in their lives.

The Minister as a Mentor

The minister is a mentor for a variety of persons by nature of the responsibilities of the minister. Many ministers serve as mentors for other ministers in their staff assignment. They supervise other ministers, and as a part of the supervisory process, they mentor their staff. Ministers also serve as mentors for key lay leaders. These leaders are the lay teachers, small group leaders, team leaders, committee members, and project leaders in the church. Without these key leaders, the church ceases to function. So, for ministers, the mentoring role comes with the assignment and is essential, not an option.

Some ministers also have the opportunity to mentor persons who are responding to God's call to vocational Christian ministry. Others have opportunity to mentor minister friends and acquaintances who serve in other churches and communities beyond those of the mentoring minister.

The Need for Developing Ministry Leaders

The church is both a spiritual fellowship of believers and a functioning institution consisting of followers of Christ. It is the responsibility of the vocational minister to prepare the disciples of Christ to be the body of Christ in the world—to do the work of Christ until Christ returns. That is the assignment of the church. Without leaders, any institution or movement fails. The church is no different in that regard. So ministers, by their calling, are to be mentors, equipping disciples for works of service, since Jesus calls all followers to be servants.

Strategies for Mentoring Ministry Leaders

A minister has responsibilities for mentoring persons in at least two areas —key lay leaders and church or ministry staff members under the supervision of the minister. These responsibilities are not optional.

Assisting key lay leaders. The mentoring task for the minister begins with the mentoring of key lay leaders. Once the church or ministry has identified and articulated its purpose and has formulated objectives and

strategies for achieving the purpose, the next step is to plan and organize in order for the church and ministry to fulfill its mission. (For a full discussion, see Charles A. Tidwell, *Church Administration: Effective Leadership for Ministry*.[469]) The minister recruits, enlists, and trains key leaders. But the minister's responsibility goes far beyond these three tasks. The minister must develop relationships with key lay leaders so that these leaders continue to grow in their spiritual maturity and their leadership abilities.

Without leaders, any institution or movement fails. So ministers, by their calling, are to be mentors, equipping disciples for servant leadership.

Who are these key lay leaders? They are the lay teachers who lead Bible study classes and small groups designed to develop disciples of Christ. They are also the persons who lead various ministry teams in the life and work of the church. These lay leaders need encouragement in their tasks, assistance with skill development for their tasks, and counsel for issues and problems that inevitably surface. The minister serves as the guide, the resource provider, the motivator, the evaluator—in short, the mentor for each of these lay leaders. Being this mentor requires that the minister invest time in each life, seeking to coach, supervise, and encourage in specific circumstances in such a way that the key lay leader knows that tangible resources for training, instruction, spiritual growth, and relationship building are readily available. This is the role of the mentor for key lay leaders.

Assisting beginning and experienced staff ministers. Many ministers have responsibilities of supervision of other staff ministers. This supervisory responsibility is a fertile opportunity for a mentoring relationship. Just as the minister mentors key lay leaders, the minister also mentors vocational ministers. The mentoring relationship goes far beyond programming, scheduling, providing resources, and evaluating. The mentoring relationship enables the minister to help staff members mature spiritually, develop new skills and aptitudes, and design effective strategies for leading ministries and growing disciples. This is the work of vocational ministers.

Assisting ministers beyond one's immediate church or ministry. Ministers are strengthened by having a "minister's minister." An important part of one's ministry is the ministry to colleagues in ministry. These colleagues may be ministers in a neighboring church, ministers in one's own community, colleagues from one's student days, ministry colleagues from former ministry settings, or ministers who become friends through

professional organizations. These ministers may be from any denomination. This kind of mentoring takes place in a variety of settings. Some persons make special efforts to visit with each other over a meal or a cup of coffee on a regular basis. Many use technology—telephone, e-mail, texting, and social media networks—as common ways to stay in touch. Some make commitments to contact each other on a regular basis—perhaps once a quarter or once a month. Some "minister's ministers" talk, text, and e-mail almost daily. For many such relationships, one minister becomes the caregiver; the other is more the client, or the one being mentored. In some cases, ministers become accountability partners to each other—each being the mentor at times, and each being mentored by the other at times. Some ministers intentionally commit to a small group of ministry partners and colleagues as mentors. These groups meet together regularly to encourage, counsel, support, and challenge each other. These support groups become ideal mentoring environments for ministers to strengthen themselves and their colleagues in ministry.

Assisting those seeking to discern God's call to ministry. Ministers also have the responsibility and opportunity to assist those seeking to discern God's call to ministry. Most often these mentoring opportunities arise for ministers with high school and college students who are considering God's call to vocational Christian ministry. Additionally, persons are responding to God's call later in life, often after a first career. These persons are often involved in the churches where the mentoring minister serves and the opportunities abound for discussing God's call, exploring ministry options, modeling ministry, and enabling persons to gain ministry experience.

Church staff members have a unique opportunity to help *call out the called*— that is, to discover persons who have gifts for ministry and who may need encouragement to listen for God's call to ministry. God works through people to influence others, and the minister as mentor can be a tremendously significant influence in the life of persons sensing God's call to ministry.

One way a minister serves as a mentor to those experiencing God's call to ministry is by being a pastoral counselor to these individuals. Persons need to hear how God's call is made known, how another minister experienced God's call, and what the next steps may be in responding to God's call. The mentoring minister can lead persons to make public a

commitment to ministry, thereby gaining the affirmation and encouragement of a congregation as the next steps are taken.

Church staff members have a unique opportunity to help *call out the called.*

Another strategy for mentoring persons called to ministry is to start a support group for such persons. Activities of the group, under the leadership of the mentor, may include:

- meeting together for prayer and discussion about ministry as a vocation,
- learning about opportunities for academic preparation for ministry,
- observing the mentoring minister perform the tasks of ministry (e.g., teaching, preaching, leading, meeting with church leaders and committees/planning groups/ministry teams, staff meetings, ministry planning sessions, weddings, baptisms, communion services, hospital visits),
- experiencing ministry tasks alongside the mentor or on assignment under the supervision of the mentor, with feedback opportunities following the experiences, and
- group projects, like local missions efforts, Bible study groups, and other group ministry opportunities.

A key opportunity for the minister to serve as a mentor for one called to vocational ministry is through a formal ministry internship. Many internships are formally designed by churches and ministries to give young ministers opportunities to gain experience in ministry under the supervision of a veteran minister. These internships may be for a short term—a semester or summer perhaps—or may be for an extended time (even multiyear, in some cases). Often these internships are for experience only, but other internships provide for academic credit through a college, university, seminary, or theological school in conjunction with a program of theological education in the academic institution. Many times these internships are unpaid, but some have provisions for pay or for other benefits such as housing or travel expenses.

For academic internships, usually the student prepares a learning covenant, or learning agreement, with the mentor/supervisor, outlining the details of the internship, including learning goals, time parameters, and any

other details that might be required by the ministry setting and by the academic institution. Usually there is a professor of record from the academic institution who works with both the student and the mentor/supervisor to coordinate the program.

Sometimes these academic internships are connected to an academic course that the student takes along with the internship. Such an arrangement provides an ideal setting for discussing and learning about ministry while actually observing and experiencing ministry in a hands-on setting. The professor guides the classroom experience while the minister serving as mentor/supervisor guides the internship experience. These internships are especially valuable in assisting a student in clarifying one's call to ministry and in identifying areas of ministry that may fit the student's call, personality, aptitudes, and interests.

The Mentor for the Minister

Every minister needs a minister. As mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, most persons seek out assistance in their lives—for physical health, for mental and emotional health, for financial well-being, and for spiritual formation. The caregivers are physicians, counselors, financial advisers, and pastors, to name a few. But for the professional minister, it is often difficult to seek assistance in one's own area of expertise—vocational ministry. This section will deal with ways a minister can find and have a minister to call on for accountability, affirmation, professional advice and assistance, and overall well-being.

The need for a minister's continuing growth and development. Crucial to a minister's effectiveness is the minister's understanding of and commitment to continued growth and development as a minister and as a person. Most find that a clear realization of God's call to vocational ministry is absolutely essential to effectiveness in ministry, especially when the going gets tough. Once the call is solidified and clarified and affirmed, then preparation for ministry is essential for effective ministry. Many find academic routes for ministry preparation—at the undergraduate level and at the professional ministry level (seminary, divinity school, theological school, university graduate programs). More and more, online and off-campus course offerings supplement or replace on-campus study in preparation for ministry. These programs allow a student to continue in a ministry setting, as an example, and not have to move self and family to another location for an

academic study opportunity. But for others, academic preparation is either not a priority or not an opportunity, and so the minister must rely on other avenues for learning about how to do ministry. For all ministers, whether formally trained or without any formal training, a commitment to continuing education in ministry is crucial for both ministry effectiveness and ministry vitality. One of the most effective strategies for continuing education in ministry is developing a mentoring relationship for the minister.

Strategies for mentoring relationships for the minister. Several strategies exist for mentoring relationships for the minister. Among them are one-on-one relationships, formal mentoring settings, formal coaching settings, and support groups with other ministers.

One-on-one relationships. Perhaps the most common way for a minister to have a mentor is to develop a one-on-one relationship with another minister. This type of relationship does not just happen in the course of being a minister. Sometimes one finds a mentor as a minister with whom one works early in one's ministry career. The relationship begins in a formal supervisory kind of relationship and develops into a lifelong mentoring relationship. Others find a mentor through a former professor, through an older minister who has served as a role model in ministry, or through an acquaintance made in a professional ministry association or network. These relationships can be enduring over a lifetime of ministry. The mentor functions as a sage, a teacher, a role model, a listener, a counselor, a motivator, a comforter, an adviser, and a true friend through all the ups and downs of ministry. There can be no greater source of encouragement than the wise counsel of such a mentor.

Every minister needs a minister.

Formal mentoring settings. Another way for a minister to have a mentor is through a formal mentoring arrangement. This is much like the academic internship mentoring environment described earlier in this chapter. The mentor is enlisted, or assigned, often through an academic arrangement. Sometimes the mentor relationship is formalized as part of one's annual evaluation system, encouraged by a personnel committee or process to seek to shore up deficiencies or weaknesses in the performance of the minister. Ideally this format should not be seen as punitive or negative but rather as an attempt by caring persons to strengthen the life and ministry of one who is important to those making the arrangement. As with the one-on-one

relationship, the mentor is seen as one who can provide training, resources, perhaps even answers, for issues and circumstances that arise in the life of the one being mentored. Many understand these kinds of mentoring settings to be particularly useful for ministers who are at the beginning stages of ministry, building upon any academic preparation for ministry to enable the beginning minister to apply one's academic learning to the practical tasks of daily ministry.

Formal coaching settings. Life coaches are becoming more and more prevalent throughout professional vocations. Life coaches help the one being coached to devise a strategy for getting feedback for decisions and issues that occur. The primary difference between a mentoring setting and a coaching setting is this: the mentor is often seen as the person who can solve the problem (with the knowledge and experience to pass on to the person being mentored), while the coach is seen as the person who facilitates the process to address the problem (to phrase questions, to provide reflection, and to challenge, encourage, and motivate the person being coached to reach solutions and answers to the issues faced). Many understand these coaching settings to be particularly useful for maturing ministers to grow and develop their own solutions and strategies. The coach can become a resource provider, but the coach is usually not expected to be the person with all the answers and experiences to satisfy the needs, formulate the solutions, or design the strategies. Formal coaching relationships are often contracted, much like one would contract the services of another professional helper.

Support groups with other ministers. Support groups serve as particularly effective resources for a minister. These support groups, sometimes called covenant groups, are formed informally when ministers with common interests, tasks, or issues come together at their own initiative to think, pray, share ideas, identify resources, and develop strategies for addressing common concerns. Other support groups of ministers are formed more formally through the work of a networking group. These networking groups may be formed through websites for minister resources, through denominational entities, and through community groups of ministers.

Mentoring Goals

Mentoring goals are in two categories for the minister. One set of goals relates to the minister serving as a mentor. The other set of goals relates to the minister being mentored.

First, these are suggested goal areas for the minister serving as a mentor:

- Identify the key lay leaders in the minister's church or ministry who must be effective in order for the church or ministry to be effective.
- Develop strategies to spend time with each key lay leader, both one-on-one and in group settings.
- Prepare to teach, encourage, and inspire the key lay leaders.
- Set times and strategies for feedback and accountability to measure effectiveness of the key lay leaders.

Realistically, a minister can probably be a mentor to no more than five or six key lay leaders at a time. Some may find that effective mentoring happens with only one person at a time, maybe taking a few weeks with one leader, then moving to the next key lay leader, until the minister has given several weeks of mentoring to each leader. The minister may then find that repeating the cycle strengthens the mentoring relationship with the group. This kind of mentoring will be a never-ending process for the minister, focusing on developing leaders for the ministry and the church.

Second, these are suggested goal areas for the minister being mentored:

- Identify another minister, or a group of ministers, to whom you can be held accountable and with whom you can be vulnerable.
- Identify key issues or growth areas that could be strengthened through a mentoring relationship.
- Set a plan to visit with a mentor, or mentors, on a regular basis—weekly, monthly, quarterly—and put the plan on a calendar.
- Develop a set of desired outcomes; then plan for the appropriate mentoring relationship to address each outcome.
- Commit to lifelong continuing education for ministry and for personal growth.
- Develop a continuing plan with topics for personal growth and development. Examples for focus areas are spiritual formation, leadership skills in ministry, preaching and teaching, time management, dealing with crises, strengthening families, and the list continues, tailored to one's individual journey in ministry.

For both sets of goals, it is important to remember the basics of goal setting. Goals must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and relevant, and

timely. If goals have these characteristics, they will be effective tools for professional and personal growth and development.

Characteristics of the Mentoring Relationship

In every mentoring relationship, the learner must be the focus. Mentoring is not nearly so much about transferring knowledge as it is about facilitating a relationship characterized by voluntary engagement on the part of both the mentor and the learner. In such a relationship, the learner becomes the beneficiary of a mentor's wisdom and experience, but more importantly, the learner learns how to use this wisdom and experience to address issues with problem-solving skills and relational skills.

The learner is the mentee. The learner must voluntarily agree to be vulnerable, transparent, and honest in the relationship. The learner must be eager to learn new skills, change ways of thinking, and develop new insights. The learner must be looking to be transformed and to grow through the mentoring experience. The learner must respect the mentor as a wise and experienced colleague who knows how to help the learner see things in new ways and with new perspectives.

In every mentoring relationship, the learner must be the focus.

The mentor is the facilitator. The mentor must be learner focused, seeking to strengthen the mentee, not seeking to elevate one's own status or sense of self-worth. The mentor must be a listener, interested in the mentee's pilgrimage and development. The mentor must be a keen observer. This requires learning as much about the mentee as possible, learning about the ministry assignments of the mentee, and carefully observing and reflecting about the trends and issues that face the minister and ministry in today's rapidly changing world. The mentor must be a resource provider knowledgeable of available networks and resources. The mentor is also a role model and guide, often modeling the behavior, attitudes, commitment, and integrity that lead to effective ministry. The mentor will be functioning best when the focus is on the learner's development, not necessarily focusing on solving the immediate problem or circumstance. mentor is a nurturing colleague who seeks to build up the mentee so that the mentee can achieve full potential as a minister and do the work of ministry with theological reflection and practical effectiveness.

For a healthy mentoring relationship to develop, the mentee must trust the mentor to be one who has the ability to lead. The mentee must take the initiative to develop the relationship. The mentee must be willing to try new ways of doing things, to think differently about matters, and to reflect on ways to be a minister as well as on ways to do the work of ministry.

The mentor in a healthy mentoring relationship helps the mentee in self-discovery and self-awareness. The mentor is most interested in helping the mentee grow and develop as a person—spiritually, intellectually, relationally, emotionally. As this personal growth takes place, the mentor will then be able to help the mentee learn how to do ministry in creative and effective ways. The goal of the mentor is to help the mentee be transformed to be healthier in mind, spirit, and self-awareness and then to help the mentee be able to perform the tasks of ministry in ways that are effective, enduring, and beneficial to the kingdom of God.

The minister is to be a mentor to key lay leaders, recognizing that God calls all persons to salvation and to service in God's kingdom. In mentoring lay leaders, the minister must recognize that all persons have a role in ministry, not just the ordained or the clergy. In this task, the minister is looking for ways to match the aptitudes, skills, and interests of lay leaders with ministry opportunities and needs. The ultimate goal of the minister/mentor is to equip the lay leader to do the work of ministry and to be a minister in one's setting. Ideally, the minister works himself/herself out of a job, but realistically the minister has a never-ending job, always looking to connect a lay leader with a ministry task at hand and equipping the lay leader for the task. The minister takes the initiative in seeking out key lay leaders to develop this mentoring relationship.

The minister is also a mentor to other ministers. In this role, the minister/mentor is more a facilitator for helping a minister colleague develop and flourish to reach one's full potential as a vocational Christian minister. The relationship may be more informal than the mentoring relationship with key lay leaders, and the relationship may more likely be initiated by the mentee. The task of being a mentor to another minister is no less important than that of mentoring lay leaders, but the relationship will be made as the mentee agrees and is eager to be mentored by one who has wisdom, knowledge, and experience to share.

Conclusion

Pastor Matt Snowden has stated that we all need mentors, peers, and protégés in our lives.[470] This is particularly true of members of the clergy.

Effective ministers will be mentors in the lives of persons throughout their ministries. These persons will be key lay leaders, church staff members under the supervision of the mentoring minister, colleagues in ministry, and aspiring ministers who may be beginning the journey in responding to and following God's call to vocational ministry.

Effective ministers will also have mentors in their lives. Some of these mentoring relationships will be informal and possibly long term. Others will be short term and designed for specific issues or circumstances. Having mentors who will allow the minister to be held accountable and to be vulnerable is crucial to the effectiveness and long-term happiness and fulfillment of the minister.

Mentoring, at its best, creates a safe and secure environment for persons to ask questions, reflect deeply, express frustrations, admit shortcomings, and seek wise counsel. Mentoring, at its best, becomes a launching pad for personal growth and professional development that moves persons from one level of effectiveness to a greater level of effectiveness and fulfillment. Mentoring is more than training to do a task. Mentoring for Christian ministers is creating a relationship that encourages, supports, motivates, and equips persons to function as Christian servants. Jesus was a discipler, a mentor, a coach. He sought out persons whom He called to follow, He taught them the basics of what it means to be a disciple, He modeled a life of ministry, He prayed for his disciples, and He taught them how they ought to live their lives. This, too, is the task of today's ministers.

Finally, ministers are to love unconditionally. Effective minister s/mentors will demonstrate a Christ-like love that goes beyond all barriers—economic, academic, cultural, ethnic, denominational, and the like. Mentors are to be persons who truly want the best for the individual being served. Mentors are more interested in the growth and development of the mentee than in the sense of accomplishment or reward for finding the right solutions to a particular problem. This interest will demonstrate itself in love—an unconditional love that is "patient" and "kind"; love that "does not envy" and "boast"; love that "is not rude" and "self-seeking"; love that "is not easily angered"; love that "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:4–7, NIV84).

The lesson to be learned is that mentoring is crucial to the minister. The minister must be a mentor, and the minister must have a mentor. Some will mentor many persons; others will mentor only a few. Some will have only one key mentor in life; others will have multiple mentors. Through these mentoring relationships, persons will be strengthened, encouraged, motivated, and inspired to minister effectively in their places of service and to accomplish great things for the glory of God.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's 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" (Eph. 4:11—12, NIV84).

Discussion Questions

1. Who are the key lay leaders in your ministry for whom you serve, or could serve, as a mentor? What are you doing to facilitate a mentoring relationship with these persons?
2. What are you doing to function as a mentor for those ministers who are under your direction and supervision?
3. Who are your colleagues in ministry in your community? In your association or denominational structure? From your student days? From your professional associations and involvement? What are you doing to network with these persons to assist them in their ministries? What are you doing to allow them to serve as mentors to you in your ministry?
4. Are there persons involved in your church or ministry who may be sensing God's call to vocational ministry? What steps could you and your church or ministry take to encourage them, affirm them, and lead them as they take the next steps in preparation for vocational ministry? What are you doing in your church or ministry to call out the called?
5. Are there internships in ministry available through your church or ministry? Is there a nearby academic institution with whom you could partner to serve as a ministry mentor for students preparing for vocational ministry?
6. Who is your mentor in ministry? What are you doing to develop an intentional mentoring relationship with your mentor?

7. Are you committed to lifelong learning as a minister? What evidence supports your answer?

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Chapter 22



RUNNING THE MINISTRY MARATHON: CARING FOR THE SPIRITUAL. LIFE OF YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

Jim Lemons, Ph.D.

Ministry Is a Marathon

What in the world was Dean Karnazes thinking? Karnazes is known as the "Ultramarathon Man," and for good reason. In 2006, Karnazes ran in fifty marathons in fifty days in all fifty states. That's right, fifty marathons, in fifty days, in all fifty states!

Karnazes's book, *Ultramarathon Man,* was the number seven bestselling sports book worldwide in 2005.[471] In 2007, he was named to the list of the top one hundred most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine.[472] Dean Karnazes is a man who knows how to run a marathon—and more.

In many respects, ministry is a marathon. Those of us involved in vocational service to God are competing in a great race that is nothing less than a long distance, oftentimes lifelong, endurance marathon. Little wonder that the Bible often draws on the imagery of the race to describe the Christian life.

> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy

> set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1–2, NIV).

Watch Out for the Ministry Marathon "Walls"

Real marathon runners talk about the danger of "hitting the wall." There usually comes a time during the race when fatigue and pain begin to take over and, suddenly, the thought of giving up enters into the runner's mind. If ministry marathon runners are not careful, they, too, can "hit the wall" of ministry fatigue, pain, and frustration. Often, once that "wall" is hit, the consequences can be pretty devastating. Consider the following results of a survey of pastors conducted by the Fuller Institute of Church Growth:

- 80% believe that pastoral ministry is affecting their family negatively
- 33% say that being in ministry is clearly a hazard to their family
- 75% have reported a significant crisis due to stress at least once every five years in their ministry
- 50% feel unable to meet the needs of the job
- 90% feel they were not adequately trained to cope with the ministry demands placed on them
- 40% report having a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month
- 37% have been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church
- 70% have a lower self-image since they have pastored than when they started
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend[473]

Pretty sobering statistics, aren't they? It seems that many in the ministry these days are, in fact, hitting a "wall," and they are simply not managing the rest of their ministry marathon very well.

> According to a 2010 *New York Times* article on clergy burnout,
>
> Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their

> use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could.[474]

> To complete your ministry marathon successfully, you must learn to manage your ministry "walls" effectively.

It is pretty apparent that while many in the ministry are devoting a lot of time and energy to caring for others, they simply are not doing a very good job caring for themselves. Author, minister (and himself a marathoner), Tim Wright, asserts:

> Ministry, by its very nature, demands a great deal of our time and personal investment. The needs of others tend to set the tone for each day. As a result, we often find it difficult to squeeze in time to focus on our own lives. We race from one meeting to the next, from crisis to hospital call, from sermon preparation to denominationally sponsored events. And we barely have the chance to take a breath. We're continually sprinting through the day, but the sprint never ends. Eventually we wind up running on empty. We begin to feel the stress mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Some of us are so exhausted, in fact, that we're ready to give up.[475]

Four "Looks" for Running the Ministry Marathon

I have been a runner for most of my life. But in addition to being a literal runner, I have also been "running" in the marathon of ministry for some thirty years, twenty-five years in pastoral ministry and five years now in teaching ministry. During this time, I have certainly hit my fair share of ministry "walls." There were seasons in my ministry that seemed to be more like a never-ending, fifty-marathons-in-fifty-days grind. Throughout this race, however, I have discovered several key directional "looks" that have greatly helped me along the way.

Look in—spiritually.

> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9: 24–27, NIV).

The apostle Paul was certainly one of the great ministry marathon runners in the Bible. Here was a man who knew how to run the race. Paul certainly encountered his fair share of "walls" along the way—adversities, hardships, troubles, problem-causing people, trials, tribulations, weariness, pain.[476] What strikes me most about Paul is that he seemed to always know the importance of "looking in" and taking care of his own spiritual life.

Here's another interesting marathon man who made some recent headlines. Joe D'Amico gained notoriety by becoming known as the marathon "McRunner." While preparing for the 2011 Los Angeles Marathon, D'Amico, a veteran of fourteen marathons, incorporated into his personal training schedule a most unusual dietary regimen. He would eat food only from McDonald's restaurants for the thirty days leading up to race day. During his special month-long marathon "McDiet," D'Amico devoured twenty-three hamburgers, twenty-four chicken snack wraps, three fish sandwiches, ninety-one hotcakes, and sixty-three cookies. As a result of his special marathon-preparation diet, Mr. "McRunner" gained twenty-three thou sand new Facebook fans, and when he had completed the race, he had actually raised some twenty-seven thousand dollars for the McDonald House Charities.[477]

For most serious marathon runners, a fast-food, junk-food diet would be a pretty ill-advised training technique. Without proper physical nourishment and nutrition for the duration of the training days, the body will simply not be ready for the rigors of the race day. The same principle holds true for running the ministry marathon. The ongoing spiritual diet of the ministry runner is obviously going to make a huge difference running the great race of ministry.

> “To take up the cross of Christ is no great action done once and for all; it consists in the continual practice of small duties which are distasteful to us.”
> —John Henry Newman

When we think about the proper spiritual diet necessary for running the ministry marathon, volumes have been written on the subject of practicing the spiritual disciplines.[478] These classic resources remain valuable training manuals for the minister’s library and life.

Martin Luther once said, “Prayer is the most important thing in my life. If I should neglect prayer for a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith.” Without that consistent “fire of faith” that comes through prayer, our fuel for the ministry marathon will be sorely insufficient. Following Paul’s example of sticking to a basic but consistent spiritual and disciplined “training diet” of prayer, meditation, Bible study and reflection, personal and corporate worship, and regular fellowship with other believers, has made a marked difference in my own successfully competing in a now-thirty-year-old ministry marathon.

Nineteenth-century American preacher and author James Freeman Clarke could well be speaking to twenty-first-century ministry marathoners when he says,

> The modern Christian does not retire into a cell to pray, but goes about doing good. He thus avoids the risk of narrowness, which attends the man who desires only to do the “nearest duty.” But there is a danger here also, that of shallowness. The man who is always giving, never receiving; always helping others, and never feeding his own soul, is in danger of becoming empty.[479]

Fellow ministry runner, there simply isn’t a more crucial training tool for effectively running the race without running on empty, than to maintain a consistent, daily diet of feeding your own soul.

Look in—physically. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” (1 Cor. 6:19, NIV84).

Ministry marathoners, while we are "looking in," we had better be "looking into" the health dimension of our running. A report on the health and wellness of clergy and lay leaders conducted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Division for Ministry and Board of Pensions found that while the majority of ministers are satisfied by their work, they are more overweight, sedentary, and prone to stress and depression than the average United States citizen. The report found that during a one-year period, 16% of male clergy and 24% of female clergy suffered from depression compared to 6% of U.S. men and 12% of U.S. women. It also says that nutrition, high blood pressure, and heart disease are areas of concern.

Fellow ministry marathoners, how can we preach and teach about the body being the temple of the Holy Spirit if our own temple is being neglected?

Let's run the race…but let's be sure that while we are running, we are always careful to "look in." The spiritual and physical aspects of our race are crucial considerations.

Look around—relationally. Consider Hebrews 12:1–2 again:

> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (NIV84).

Every good marathon runner knows that it's better to train for the race with a "running buddy." When one hits those "walls" during the race, having someone there to support and encourage you really does make all the difference in the world. And so it is in life and in ministry. Fellow marathoners, the fact is we need others, and we need each other as fellow ministry runners.

After many years of being a rather casual runner, I ran in a real-life marathon. (Notice that I say running "in" a marathon, not actually running "a" marathon.) I got together with some former high school track mates, and we entered into the relay portion of the White Rock Marathon in Dallas, Texas. Just before the finish of my fourth leg of the race, runners face two

consecutive hills. Climbing those two grueling hills was definitely the "hitting the wall" moment in the race for me.

What kept me running? What helped me make it to the finish line? It was the simple realization that I knew that I was not running alone. Fellow runners were right there with me, plugging away, climbing those hills, never giving up, never quitting. And all along the race route, spectators were there shouting out words of encouragement for all of us weary runners. As I finally made it over that last hill and approached that finish line, the most encouraging sight of all was seeing friends and fellow teammates there at the end, inspiring me to finish the race.

Out of all those "hitting the wall" ministry statistics mentioned earlier, these two have to be the most troubling ones for me: 70% of all ministers do not have someone they consider a close friend,[480] and 75% don't know where to turn when they have a family or personal conflict or issue.[481]

Ten years ago, a group of my former high school Christian friends and fellow athletes began a monthly Bible study, accountability, mutual encouragement, and fellowship group we called "The Halftime Huddle Group." At the time, we were all approaching the midlife season of our lives, and we all knew we were quickly entering into what would, no doubt, be a pretty challenging season of life. The grueling hills would be ever looming on the horizon—physically, emotionally, financially, and relationally. Over this past ten-year period, we have run with each other through a multitude of serious health issues, discouraging depressions, devastating job losses, debilitating divorces, and disappointing children who've suddenly gone astray. Without the support of having fellow runners along the way, I really doubt very many of us would be finishing the race very well at all. Ministry marathoners need someone to unload on, someone to turn to, someone to run with, and someone to encourage them to keep on keeping on toward that finish line.

"Your training partners are key to your success, and friendships based on your runs together are strong."
—Bill Rogers (legendary marathoner)

Yes, to effectively run the ministry marathon, runners need to "look around" and look to, learn from, and lean on their fellow runners.

Look around—maritally. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25, NIV84).

As ministry runners are busy "looking around" while running the race course, they need to be sure to be looking out for the most important "running buddy" they have. The typical "job posting" for today's minister's wife would probably look something like this:

> HELP WANTED: Pastor's wife. Must sing, play music, lead youth groups, raise seraphic children, entertain church notables, minister to other wives, have ability to recite Bible backward and choreograph Christmas pageant. Must keep pastor sated, peaceful, and out of trouble. Difficult colleagues, demanding customers, erratic hours. Pay: $0.[482]

Consider these statistics relating to the marital part of the ministry marathon:

- 13% of active pastors are divorced.
- Those in ministry are equally likely to have their marriage end in divorce as general church members.
- 25% of pastors' wives see their husband's work schedule as a source of conflict.
- The clergy has the second highest divorce rate among all professions.
- 40% of pastors and 47% of spouses are suffering from burnout, frantic schedules, and/or unrealistic expectations.
- 45% of pastors' wives say the greatest danger to them and their family is physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual burnout.
- 52% of pastors say they and their spouses believe that being in pastoral ministry is hazardous to their family's well-being and health.[483]

Eight in ten pastors' wives say they feel unappreciated or unaccepted by their husband's congregation, according to surveys by the Global Pastors Wives Network (GPWN); the same number wish their husbands would choose another profession. "Wives' issues" is the number one reason ministers leave their ministries. The divorce rate among ministers and their wives is 50%, no better than that of the general public.[484]

> "There is no more lovely, friendly, and charming relationship, communion or company, than a good marriage."

—Martin Luther

Fellow runners, we simply cannot let ourselves become so preoccupied with seeing to the wellbeing of our flock that we end up neglecting the most important shepherding role we have: caring for our marriage relationship. I have run every step of the way of my great ministry marathon with my great life partner, sweetheart, "running buddy," and best friend, Kathy. Over several decades of married life, we've certainly experienced many joyful "mountaintop runs" in life and ministry. But we've also had our fair share of the "valley runs" that always accompany the ministry marathon. Through it all, however, we have consistently stuck with one simple ministry time commitment that has helped shepherd our relationship every mile of the marathon. We simply claimed Thursday nights each week as "our night." This became our little "date night." No committee meetings, no other commitments, just the two of us. Sometimes, when the funds were a little low (which seemed to be often in those early days of our ministry race), that "date night" might have just been be a quick trip to the local Sonic Drive-In for a Coke or a cup of tea. Sometimes it would be nothing more than a long, slow walk together. The point was not the quantity of the date, but the quality of the date and the fact that in the midst of two very busy schedules, the two of us were simply making time and taking time to spend with each other. Those simple date nights were marvelous nights, and they sure helped make running the rest of our ministry marathon together a whole lot more manageable and meaningful.

Look ahead. "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12–14, NIV).

As Paul contemplated his own ministry marathon—his one great passion, his one great desire—even as he approached the end of his race, he just kept pressing on toward that glorious goal before him. Paul knew well the importance of focus in the great race of life and ministry.

"For a small reward, a man will hurry away on a long journey; while for eternal life, many will hardly take a single step."

—Thomas à Kempis

Consider the story of another "marathoner" in a different long-distance competition context. Florence Chadwick was an American long-distance swimmer who was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 1970. Her two most famous accomplishments included swimming the English Channel and the twenty-one miles from Catalina Island to Los Angeles. Chadwick failed in her first attempt to swim the Catalina Channel on July 4, 1952. She was pulled from the water less than a mile from the shore. What was it that discouraged her? What was it that caused her to give up? It wasn't the shark-infested, frigid Pacific waters. It wasn't even the fatigue of her fifteen-hour-and-fifty-five minute swim to that point. What eventually got to Chadwick was simply the fog she encountered that day. At a news conference afterwards, Chadwick told a reporter, "Look, I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen land, I know I could have made it." The fog kept her from seeing her goal, and it felt to her like she was getting nowhere.[485] Despite being told land was only one mile away, she didn't believe it and quit.[486]

While competing in the ministry marathon, it's easy for "the fog" (all that "stuff" that goes along with doing ministry) to cause us to lose sight of the ultimate goal before us. I remember well how I felt while trying to climb those two grueling hills during my own little part of that White Rock marathon. Those hills were hurting. They were tough to traverse. I was growing weary. I was ready to give up. But then, as I made it over that last hill, there before me was a most glorious sight, the finish line, now just a hundred yards or so ahead of me. Seeing the end, keeping my eyes on the goal, "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead" (Phil. 3:13, NIV)—that's what motivated me to just keep on pressing on to that finish line.

Fellow ministry marathon runner, remember *why* you are running. Remember *what* you are running for. Remember the goal, remember the prize. You are running *with* a purpose. You are running *for* a purpose. Remember that there really is no greater calling, no greater race, than the great ministry marathon in which you are now running. Don't let whatever "fog" that currently surrounds you get you down or discouraged. Your labors for the Lord are not in vain. Just keep your eye on the prize.

Look in, look around, look ahead, and, finally, be sure that you always look one more place.

Look up. "…Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, *fixing our eyes on Jesus,* the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1b—2, NIV italics added for emphasis).

Thus far, we have explored several key dimensional looks for successfully running the ministry marathon: inwardly, horizontally, outwardly. The author of Hebrews would be quick to add a vital *vertical* look that really overlooks all the others.

While "looking up" is certainly not a very wise strategy for running in the physical realm, it is absolutely imperative for those running in the spiritual world of ministry.

Consider the bumblebee.[487] A bee's wings are so tiny and frail for its size that technically, it cannot fly; all logic says it can't but it does. God made it to fly, and unless you put it in a glass tumbler, it will always fly wherever it needs to go. It will fly up and zig and zag and go from one wonderful destination to the next. But if you put that bee in a glass tumbler, even one without a lid, the bee is suddenly in big trouble. If the bee cannot look up, the bee is doomed.

Even without a cover or lid on the glass, the bee will not escape and will beat itself against the walls of the glass until it gives up and dies. Why? Because it failed to look up and fly, fly upward. It can. The means of escape is there, but if it doesn't look up, it will not know which way to go.

That tumbler well represents the many adversities (marathon "walls") that ministers encounter while running in the ministry marathon. So often, just like the busy bee, we forget that the way out of our "walls" is always up. If we don't look up, we run the risk of losing all sense of direction for life and ministry.

That bee knows it can fly and that it can fly up. It has been doing it every day of its life, but surrounded by trouble, it panics and loses heart. And this can easily happen to ministry marathon runners as well. Weary ministry marathon runners, just keep looking up and fixing your eyes on Jesus. He is the great Pioneer and Perfecter of your faith. He will see you through.

Finishing the Race

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7–8, NIV).

Paul wasn’t content just to be a good starter in the race of his life and ministry. Rather he was committed to becoming a fantastic finisher.

Consider a couple of final ministry marathon running-related illustrations:

On October 16, 2011, a one-hundred-year-old man completed the Toronto marathon, becoming the oldest person to ever successfully finish that long-distance running achievement. Indian-born Fauja Singh came close to quitting about six hours into the race but persevered and finished the 26.2-mile race in about eight hours, twenty-five minutes. Singh, who didn’t even take up running until he turned eighty, will likely be named the Guinness World Record holder for the world’s oldest marathoner.[488]

On Sunday, June 12, 2011, a special celebration service was held at Saint Giles Bramhope Church, near Leeds, England. What was the special occasion? It was to honor the birthday of Canon John Clayton, a Church of England vicar, who was still preaching at the age of one hundred.[489]

> “If you set a goal for yourself and are able to achieve it, you have won your race. Your goal can be to come in first, to improve your performance, or just to finish the race—it’s up to you.”
> —Dave Scott (six-time Ironman champion)

As a ministry marathon runner, you may not still be running at the age of one hundred, but God’s desire is that however long you run, you finish the ministry course God has set out for you. If you have been called to the race, you have been called to be in it for the long haul. And so you run, and run, and run, and you just keep on running. You fight the fight, you finish the race, and you keep the faith. And how do you do it? How do you finish the race and finish it well? You do it by always remembering to take four long, hard looks at your ministry. You look in, you look around, you look ahead, and for every step of the race, you never forget to look up.

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31, NIV).

Fellow runners, however long your race for the Lord may turn out to be, may you soar on wings like eagles—even if it be into your hundreds. May you run, and run long, and run well. And as you run, may you never grow weary and may you never be faint as the Lord renews your strength every mile, every step, of your great ministry marathon!

Discussion Questions

1. How well are you "looking in" and taking care of your own ongoing spiritual growth and development? What is one basic spiritual discipline that you will commit to today that will help you more effectively run your ministry marathon?
2. How well are you "looking in" and taking care of your own "temple of the Holy Spirit"? What is one change or new commitment you will make today in the area of your physical health and well-being?
3. As you "look around," do you have some kind of mutual fellowship and accountability support system in place? What is one step you will commit to today to foster this important part of your ministry marathon?
4. As you "look around," how well are you managing your marriage relationship? What one thing will you commit to today to enrich your ministry marathon partnership? (For starters, how about setting that date night?)
5. Is your marathon getting a little tiresome? Have you "hit a wall" in your run? Are there a few hills looming on the horizon before you today? Reread those "looking ahead" and "looking up" Scripture passages in this chapter. Is there a particular recommitment of your race that you need to make today?

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Chapter 23



ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE

Daryl Eldridge, Ph.D.

The turning point in my life as a minister of education was realizing the significance of my role in the life of our congregation. Who helped people grow in their faith? Who showed couples how to have a Christian home? Who provided additional classrooms and trained teachers so that the church could grow spiritually and numerically? Who ensured that new members were nurtured and assimilated into the body of Christ? Who guided members to discover their spiritual gifts and mobilize them for ministry? Who trained people how to share the good news?

I came to the conclusion this kind of transformation doesn't take place in "big church." As wonderful as my pastor's sermons were and as spiritually uplifting was the music led by our minister of worship, a large worship gathering does little to help believers grow in their faith. If we want people to experience spiritual transformation, it requires leadership that understands the process of discipleship. The church must teach, or it fails to be the church.[490] I could not blame the lack of growth of believers on the pastor or the minister of worship. I realized no one might know who I was or what I did. I might not receive praise from the congregation or adulation on the platform. But if I failed, the church would fail. Humbled and motivated, I wanted to learn everything I could about how people grow in their faith. Today our task appears to be more difficult than it was a generation ago. Cultural and technological changes are impacting how we do ministry. We

will examine several cultural factors and trends in the church that impact the process of making disciples.

Cultural Influences

Consumerism. This is not a soapbox against our economic system. We must consume resources to survive. "The problem is not consuming to live, but rather living to consume."[491] Alan Hirsch believes the major threat to the viability of our faith is that of consumerism.[492] Consumerism affects spiritual growth in several ways.[493]

First, consumerism defines us by what we buy and what we possess. Consumerism says you are what you drive, what you wear, what music you listen to on your iPod. The purpose-driven life gives way to the purchase-driven life. One of the tenets of Christianity is that our identity is in Christ. It is not what we possess but who possesses us.

Second, consumerism feeds discontent. If you are defined by what you have, then you can never have enough. It's a vicious cycle of acquisition. Bertrand Russell contended, *"It is preoccupation with possessions, more than anything else, that prevents us from living freely and nobly."*[494]

Contentment is not a result of our circumstances, socioeconomic level, health, position, or salary. Paul wrote, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Philippians 4:11b-13, NIV84).

Third, consumerism results in decreased savings and increased debt. The debt load makes it difficult for Christians to live missionally and give to the poor and needy.

Fourth, consumerism turns church into something that serves our needs rather than serving the needs of others. Consumerism is barking at us when we hear, "The church is not meeting my needs," or "I'm leaving the church because I want to go deeper," or "The music is too loud," or "The lessons are not relevant."

> As a result, choosing a church today isn't merely about finding a community to learn and live out the Christian faith. It's about "church shopping" to find the congregation that best expresses my identity. This

> drives Christian leaders to differentiate their church by providing more of the features and services people want. After all, in a consumer culture the customer, not Christ, is king.[495]

Christ didn't provide ten principles to market the church. This is not to say that marketing is evil or that we shouldn't meet the physical and spiritual needs of others. It is a reminder that the call of Christ is a call to die. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:24–25, NIV84).

Individualism. Individualism ("I don't need you; I will do my own thing") is not part of authentic Christian community. It cannot be. However, according to Robert Bellah, individualism has been entwining itself in the fabric of American life for more than 195 years.[496] No wonder the church gives little conscious consideration to its unchristian ethic. God intended us to live the Christian life in cooperative community. T. S. Eliot said, "What life have you if you have not life together? There is no life that is not in community, and no community not lived in praise of GOD."[497]

When the Christian life is a solo experience, worshipers become spectators, church becomes an event, sin is private, discipleship is optional, and witness is left to professionals. Bonhoeffer calls this cheap grace.[498]

> When the Christian life is a solo experience, worshipers become spectators, church becomes an event, sin is private, discipleship is optional, and witness is left to professionals.

When we are born again, we are born into a family. Can you imagine a family leaving a newborn to survive on its own? "Here is a set of eating utensils. I hope you have a good life." The parents would be charged, and rightly so, with child abandonment. Yet, too often when a person becomes a follower of Jesus, a new creation in Christ, discipleship is presented as optional. Spiritual disciplines are taught as personal habits practiced privately rather than in community. Living out our faith in small groups becomes an elective only for those who are immature. Scott McKnight writes,

> …Humans are designed to be part of a *Community.* For me, there is always this question, which shows whether or not I am leaning toward the Individualist side: What am I doing that is what my community calls me to do that I would rather not do? Or, what am I doing that I know is not God's will that my community imposes on me?[499]

Christian fellowship is living life together. Through relationships we learn how to love those who are unlike us, minister to one another, and be on mission together. Bible study is not left to one's personal interpretation or imagination. The church "must foster communal practices that allow us to submit to one another as the Spirit works to interpret the Scriptures. We do this not as a democracy, but as a Spirit-filled community where we submit to each other's authoritative gifts."[500]

Walking our own path is unbiblical, unwise, foolhardy, and dangerous. The Father made us individuals with individuality, not individualism. The individual is whole and healthy only as part of the community of believers.

Religious pluralism. Societies will continually become more diverse in race, culture, and religious faith. Cultural and ethnic diversity is a positive thing. The challenge facing the Western church is beyond racial and ethnic diversity, but the diminishing of its prominence in the sacred arena. The Bible is no longer considered the only sacred text. What we value as the Holy Scriptures is being placed alongside the Koran, Kangyur, Four Books of Confucianism, or the Book of Mormon as one of many sources for spirituality.

Skepticism is deeply engrained in the Western scientific mind. We are taught from an early age not to believe everything we read or hear. In other words, we are taught to challenge the truth of the message. Authorities are to be questioned. How do teachers deal with the diverse belief systems, diverse backgrounds, and diverse family structures when the Bible and the Christian worldview are not regarded as the only authority?[501]

Speed of life. When people are asked how they are doing, the reply often heard is, "I'm busy!" Hurry characterizes our culture. Our culture values speed and noise. The band Alabama summed it up well in the lyrics of their hit song, "I'm in a Hurry (And Don't Know Why)."[502]

Western society suffers from hurry sickness. We compress as much as possible into a day until there is little margin. If you're not busy, you are not

important. Electronic devices make it possible for us to connect 24–7. Recording devices provide entertainment anytime, anywhere. Immediate gratification drives our lives—"I want it and I want it now.” Richard Swenson, a medical doctor, contended our marginless life affects us physically mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.[503] John Ortberg wrote:

> …Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. Hurry can destroy our souls. Hurry can keep us from living well. As Carl Jung wrote, “Hurry is not of the devil: hurry is the devil.”
>
> Again and again, as we pursue spiritual life, we must do battle with hurry. For many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of life.[504]

There is no quick fix for spiritual immaturity or a fast process for becoming a fully mature follower of Jesus. Discipleship requires time and reflection—two things that are in short supply in our culture. We fight against silence and solitude because we are confronted with how insignificant we are when alone in the presence of God. We turn on our mp3 players or the TV to drown out our aloneness. For believers to grow in Christ, we must learn how to counter the time pressures of our culture and make our relationship with God a priority.

Technology and learning. There is growing evidence that technology is changing the way our brain processes information and ideas. The brains of those who have grown up on video games and computers process information differently. For the Internet generation, learning is accidental rather than sequential. Rather than learning about, they learn by doing and being.

Video games rely on failure in order to learn. The plus of this medium is that while there is a high rate of failure, the cost for failure is low and learning is immediate. Video gamers can visually track more objects at one time. They have better eye-hand coordination, quicker reaction times, wider peripheral vision, and improved spatial skills. They also work better with teams.[505]

Learning must move from being content driven and teacher driven to learning that is engaging, interactive, and learner centered.

We are only in the early stages of understanding how the brain works and the implications for learning. The brain constructs messages differently from reading and listening. Each leaves a different set of memories.[506] As research explores how we learn, we can expect that learning via the Internet will also leave a different set of memories than reading and listening. The implication for Christian education is that learning must move from being content driven and teacher driven to learning that is engaging, interactive, and learner centered.

While our world will continue to see the growth and impact of technology in our daily lives, we'll also see the importance of face-to-face interactions as people hunger for community and authentic intimacy.

Trends in the Church

It is difficult to know when something is a short-lived phenomenon or whether it is trend that will have a longer impact in the life of the church. The following are but a few of the issues impacting discipleship. These items were collected from a number of practitioners, denominational leaders, and faculty members.

Biblical illiteracy. George Gallup, Jr., George Barna, and others cited that while Americans revere the Bible, they don't read it. Biblical illiteracy is more than not knowing names and places in the Bible. Many Christians do not understand how the many stories fit together into one story of redemption.[507] Seminary professor Morlee Maynard said, "The notion that adults will not prepare for Bible study is causing many churches to lower the bar in valuing the role of intentionality in spiritual transformation. The increase in fellowship groups with a short devotional will contribute to the lack of biblical literacy among believers."[508]

Reading is not the preferred method of learning. To compound the challenge of biblical illiteracy, many adults no longer obtain information through reading. It is not that these adults can't read but that reading is not their preferred medium for learning. They may listen to podcasts, watch videos, research online, or interact with others in a small group. They may not be readers, but this does not mean they are not avid learners.

We must use every available medium to communicate the word of God. If adults are not reading Scripture, how will we help parents disciple their children? How will technology interface with spiritual development?

Curriculum. Teachers and small groups have never been blessed by as many options in curriculum as there are today. In addition to the traditional printed resources for teachers and pupils, video lessons and online resources are available. Yet, with a plethora of choices, many churches are not providing student books in Sunday School. This trend may be an attempt to save money, but it's more a recognition that fewer members are using printed materials.[509]

Rather than turning to denominational publications, a growing number of churches are writing their own curriculum or using curriculum written by other churches. Sermon-based lessons are also growing in popularity. Some churches like Saddleback Church write an annual campaign like "40 Days of Purpose" as a means of uniting their small groups around the mission of the church.

Off-campus small groups and Internet groups. Bible study groups that meet away from the church campus and Internet small groups are the fastest-growing segments in Christian education. Leaders said they are utilizing off-campus groups because they can't afford to build more educational space, small groups do a better job of reaching the lost, and spiritual transformation is more likely to occur in small intimate groups. Others contend small groups are not as consistent in attendance, are weaker on the use of the Bible in their studies, and provide logistical problems such as childcare.

It is very difficult to support both a Sunday School model and an off-campus small groups model. Christian education leaders will need to determine which approach will work best for their situation.

Another trend is house churches.[510] While small groups are usually connected to a traditional church, house churches are less so, although they may belong to a network of house churches. They consider the group that meets in a home to be the basic body of Christ.[511] The percentage of people involved in house churches has more than doubled in the past decade.[512]

Putting a face on missions. More than any time in history, Christians are embarking on cross-cultural mission projects. The American church is no longer content to simply give to missions or hear about missions from mission organizations. More than ever before, people are spending their vacation time and money to minister near and far (overseas).[513]

It is estimated that more than 1.5 million Christians travel outside the U.S. on mission projects.[514] Christian education, going forward, must be more intentional about helping people not just go on mission trips but see themselves as always on mission with Christ whether that is overseas, next door, or at work.

A related issue is the successful efforts to offer support groups that help the church build a bridge to the community. Congregations like the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, are reducing personal and church expenditures in order to serve those who are under resourced and far from God. The Internet generation is asking two questions of the church: Will you accept me for who I am? What are you doing to help those less fortunate in the world?

Fewer organized discipleship efforts. Darryl Wilson and Rick Yount contend there are fewer organized discipleship efforts in today's church. Worship services are given priority in time, energy, and resources.[515] This is not a question of which is more important—worship services/preaching or Bible study/small groups. As Morlee Maynard said, "God must be wringing his hands over this one because both play very important roles in the lives of Christ-followers and our church families."

Focus on family and family-based discipleship. There is huge focus on family. The number of homeschoolers continues to grow. More mothers are staying home with their children. The younger generation seems to be more conservative in some ways, including their view of family.[516]

How to Thrive in Christian Education

Have a firm sense of calling. Christian education is a personally rewarding and fulfilling ministry. However, ministry can also be difficult. You will most likely experience some very un-Christian attitudes and behaviors in the church from those you would least expect. The only thing that will keep you going is a deep conviction that God has called you to the ministry of Christian education. For servant leaders, Christianity is not a vocation. It's a way of life. It's a life of service. Embrace that and you'll find joy and fulfillment in your calling.[517]

Minister to your family. Jesus said, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26, NIV84). The same could be said of your family—" What good will it be if you should win

the admiration of the church and lose your own family?" Involve your spouse and children in your ministry, but also encourage them to use their gifts and abilities in other ministries inside and outside the church.

> For servant leaders, Christianity is not a vocation. It's a way of life. It's a life of service.

While you may feel the need to vent about what is going on in staff relationships or in the church, be careful of the messages you are sending to your family. Negative messages about the church can impact how your spouse and children view the faith community.

Practice the spiritual disciplines with your family. Model the faith in your home. Use holidays as opportunities to teach the Christian faith to your children. Be a part of a small group Bible study whether it is on Sunday morning or in a home during the week. If we say that small group Bible study is important to spiritual development, every Christian leader should be involved in one.

Develop meaningful relationships with others. Ministers are not terminated because they don't know how to parse a Greek verb or can't design an innovative program. They are terminated because they can't work well with people. One of my former students said, "Dr. Eldridge, ministry would be great if it weren't for people." I had to bite my tongue so I wouldn't respond, "For the kingdom's sake, do something else!" Ministry begins and ends with a heart for people. We don't love because it's our job or because it will help us accomplish our agenda. We love because Christ first loved us. Henri Nouwen wrote:

> Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy, intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead. Many Christian empire-builders have been people unable to give and receive love.[518]

Notice that Nouwen encouraged us not only to give love but also to *receive* love. Make it your mantra to have a relational-driven ministry. Relationships should be a way of life. Effective ministry is not dependent on cool technology or the financial resources of your organization. Keith Ferrazzi

wrote that effectiveness is dependent on whom you know and how you work with them. The real key is working well with people.[519]

Technology provides wonderful ways to stay connected with people, and we need to use social media. However, there is no substitute for face-to-face time with others. Invite people into your home. Spend time with others outside of the church. Develop significant relationships with others who are not yet followers of Jesus.

Devote time daily to prayer. We do a lot of talking about prayer in the church. Unfortunately, we do so little of it. Dr. J. M. Price, the founding dean of the School of Religious Education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote about the importance of prayer in the leader's life:

> The leader who is undaunted in inspiring faith in others should practice the presence of God. In every age, the men who have led great religious movements have been mystics. They have had definite fellowship with God. They are convinced of God's leadership and of their part in His plans. Times have not changed.[520]

This message is as true today as it was several generations ago and will be just as important as we move forward. Henri Nouwen echoes the words of Price:

> But for the future of Christian leadership it is of vital importance to reclaim the mystical aspect of theology so that every word spoken, every advice given, and every strategy developed can come from a heart that knows God intimately.[521]

Model the spiritual life people will emulate. Make it a goal to be the epitome of a mature Christian. Unfortunately, we all know Christian leaders who are arrogant and have little patience, faith, and joy. In other words, their fruit doesn't demonstrate the work of the Spirit. They may be effective speakers or great visionaries, but they are not spiritual giants. Our goal for spiritual maturity is not about impressing people. That motivation leads to spiritual narcissism. We don't grow spiritually for our own sake. We grow for the sake of others. Gary Thomas wrote,

> When our goals reach beyond making it into heaven to a life of ministry and impact here on earth, maturity does matter. I can be immature and reach heaven. I'm not sure, however, that I can remain immature and see hell break apart at my feet. If I am steeped in habitual sin, if I remain a spiritual adolescent, I cannot threaten hell, not while kissing its feet or lusting after its trinkets.
>
> The goal I adopted—seeing hell break apart at my feet—encourages me to grow, not just for my own sake, but for the sake of others. It urges me to walk more closely with God so that I can be His co- worker and carry on the work of Christ as I commune with Him.[522]

People go to physicians when they have medical problems. They expect those trained in medicine to be able to check vital signs, identify the symptoms, diagnose the illness, and then prescribe a treatment plan. In a similar way, Christian educators are spiritual physicians. We discern where people are in their spiritual walk. Like physicians, we must identify the prevailing symptoms of spiritual ill health and provide a treatment plan for disciples. The prescriptions of our vocation include a wide range of spiritual practices including the spiritual disciplines, curriculum resources, small groups, conferences, one-on-one discipleship, and retreats. Become familiar with the broad range of spiritual disciplines that have been practiced for thousands of years.[523]

Make yourself indispensable. Always ask: "How can I help?" Take on tasks that no one else is willing to do, even if that means taking on something you know little about. I was called to a church shortly before finishing my seminary masters degree. I went to my first day expecting glorious things to occur. After a warm greeting from my pastor, he said, "Would you please go out to the bus and clean up some dog poop that is on the floor?" I don't recall learning how to do that in seminary. I should have taken Poop Scoop 101. The event was a reminder that we are called to be servant leaders. In Matthew 20:26–27, Jesus said, in essence, *If you want to lead, serve*. I've been fortunate to work with godly men and women who didn't find it beneath their position to set up tables, move chairs, take out trash, or do whatever it took to minister to others.

The way you expand your influence is to do well the things that are entrusted to you. When given an assignment, do it with excellence.

Never stop growing in your professional skills. Leaders are learners. Of all people, those of us in Christian education should model continuing learning. Each year develop a personal learning plan. In what areas do you need to grow? Set learning goals for the year, and then determine your strategy for accomplishing the goals. Review your goals and strategies each week as your plan your upcoming week.

Your strategies might include attending professional organizations such as Baptist Association of Christian Educators (BACE), children's or youth ministry organizations, or National Association of Church Business Administration. Attend leadership conferences. Enroll in a formal degree program such as a master of Christian education, doctor of ministry program, MBA, or other programs that will enhance your skill sets. Take online courses or continuing education classes. Have a reading plan that includes fields other than your area of ministry. Some of your most innovate ideas will germinate from unlikely sources.

Support the pastor and other team members. Possibly the most important relationships outside of family members are the relationships with your pastor and other team members. A church and your ministry can be shipwrecked when staff members are not rowing in the same direction.

Check your motives as to whether you are behaving like a servant leader rather than a self-serving leader.[524] If you want others to trust you, you must first be trustworthy. Do you keep your commitments? Are you on time for meetings? Do you gossip or talk about others in a negative light?

You build the team one relationship at a time. Support your teammates through your loyalty, your encouragement, and by completing your assignments the very best you can.[525] See yourself as servant to others on your team.

Solicit your pastor's input and feedback on your work. Communicate frequently what you are doing and why. No one likes to be blindsided about what's going on. Understand the pastor's priorities and vision and make sure that your ministry is in line with the church's vision.

Learn to deal with conflict. If two or three are gathered together, eventually there will be conflict. Unfortunately, few ministry leaders are skilled at conflict resolution, and they usually will do anything to avoid conflict. However, conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. Conflict can be an opportunity for personal and organizational growth. Conflict can help clarify decisions that are not in keeping with the organization's values or identify

processes that are not working. For most of us, conflict resolution has to be learned; it does not come naturally. It takes practice and experience.

Start with yourself and ask what part you play in the conflict. Assume the best motivations from everyone. Make it a safe environment where people can work out conflict and say what they are really thinking.[526] Seek first to understand the other point of view before you share your thoughts.[527]

Stay focused on what you want from the conversation. It's not about proving you are right or that someone is wrong. Don't take things personally. Work the problem. Be observant about what's going on with people. Are they pulling back, withdrawing, or becoming angry? Learn to speak persuasively and not abrasively. Be sure that once a shared decision is made it is implemented. Trust is developed when we keep our word.

Clearly articulate the process of spiritual transformation. Know the process your church will use to help people move from irreligious to devoted followers of Jesus. There are many touted models for discipleship including the Purpose-Driven Church,[528] the Disciple-Making Church,[529] the Simple Church,[530] and the Connecting Church.[531] Models may focus on Sunday School,[532] small groups,[533] home groups, or other formats for their discipleship strategy.

Jesus taught large crowds (Matt. 14:21), midsize groups (Luke 10:1), small groups (Luke 6:13), and one-on-one (John 4). He taught those inside the religious community (Matt. 15:1) and those outside the religious community (Matt. 9:10). He taught men, women, and children (Matt. 14:21). He taught in the synagogue (Matt. 4:23) and as they walked along the road (Luke 9:57; 19:1–11). There is no one way to disciple people. Use seminars, conferences, workshops, retreats, small groups, and mentors. However, don't simply adopt a cafeteria model. Be intentional about how you will disciple others and be able to explain it in a way that a new Christian or an unbeliever can understand.

Enjoy the Journey

We return to the opening question: Who is going to help others grow in Christ and equip them for service? If it is not you, then who? More than ever before, we need servant leaders who understand how to disciple people through the entire lifespan. As discussed in this chapter, discipling others will not be an easy task in our culture. However, there is nothing more

meaningful in life than being apart of God's transforming work in the lives of others. I believe God is calling Christian educators from this generation to partner with Him in redeeming our world. The challenges facing the world have not caught God off guard. People want to connect with something beyond this physical existence and to discover the purpose and meaning for their lives. There is a spiritual hunger in our world. Technology today makes it easy to connect with others and to disciple people around the globe. What a great time to be alive and engaged in ministry. Make "the most of every opportunity" (Ephesians 5:16, NIV84), and experience the joy of seeing lives changed forever!

Discussion Questions

1. What other cultural issues do you think will impact the making of disciples in the twenty-first century?
2. How will consumerism and individualism affect the making of disciples?
3. How does hurry affect your spiritual life? What will you do to counter this spiritual illness?
4. What other trends do you see in the church that will have an impact on discipleship?
5. How are you at conflict resolution? Do you embrace conflict as an opportunity to grow, or do you avoid it at all costs? What next steps will you take in developing the skill of crucial conversations?
6. How would you explain to a friend your calling to the ministry of Christian education?
7. How does it motivate you to imagine "hell breaking apart at your feet"? What excites you about the journey ahead in Christian education? What concerns you?

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Appendix A



SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SMALL GROUP WORKSHEETS FOR ANALYSIS OF GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT

Bernard M. Spooner, Ph.D.534

Think of yourself as an outside consultant who is making recommendations to church leaders for both growth and improvement of the Sunday School or small group ministry. Complete one age group before moving to the next.

1. ***Determine total enrollment by age group:*** For each age group, list in the chart the actual number of persons on your Sunday School and/or small group list, which should include enrollment *plus* prospects. *Revise the charts by adding or deleting lines to fit your groupings.*
2. ***Determine the maximum group size:*** Add *Current Enrollment* and *Prospects on File* to determine the *Total Possibilities* for each age group.
3. ***Determine the number of teaching groups needed:*** Divide *Total Possibilities* by *Recommended Maximum Group Size* (or limit as shown in the chart) for each group. The result is the number of teaching groups (classes) needed for each age group.
4. ***Determine the number of teachers/workers needed:*** Divide *Total Possibilities* by *Recommended Pupil to Adult Ratio* as shown in the charts for each age group to determine how many teacher and workers are needed.

Growth and Improvement Analysis Worksheet—Preschool

Preschool Age Groups	Current Enrollment	Prospects on File	Total Possibilities	Recommended Maximum Group Size	Teaching Groups Needed	Recommended Child to Adult Ratio	Total Workers Needed
Babies				12		3	
Ones				12		3	
Twos				12		3	
Threes				12		3	
Fours				16		4	
Fives				16		4	
Kindergarten				16		4	

Recommendations: Using the *Recommended Maximum Group Size* and *Recommended Child to Adult Ratio*, what would you recommend to church leaders based on the information you developed above?

1. *What teaching groups will be needed?* Considering the *Recommended Maximum Group Sizes* (twelve for Babies through Threes, and sixteen for Fours, Fives, and Kindergarteners),
    - What additional teaching groups do you recommend if *all* of the necessary space is available? _____
    _____
    - If space is limited, what additional teaching groups do you recommend?
    _____
2. *How many teachers/workers will be needed?* If one teacher/worker is needed for each three persons (pupils) for Babies through Threes and for each four persons (pupils) for Fours, Fives, and Kindergarteners,
    - How many additional workers are needed to provide for *all* of the current enrollment and prospects *(Total Possibilities)?* _____
    - If space is limited, how many workers are needed to provide only for the groups you would recommend? ____

3. *Do you think this recommendation is practical?* Explain. _____
_____

4. *What are some other thoughts or suggestions to improve the ministry and better meet the needs of this age division?* _____
_____

Growth and Improvement Analysis Worksheet—Children

Children's				Recommended	Teaching	Recommended	Total

Division Grades	Current Enrollment	Prospects on File	Total Possibilities	Maximum Group Size	Groups Needed	Child to Adult Ratio	Workers Needed
1st Grade				30		6	
2nd Grade				30		6	
3rd Grade				30		6	
4th Grade				30		6	
5th Grade				30		6	
6th Grade				30		6	

Recommendations: Using the *Recommended Maximum Group Size* and *Recommended Child to Adult Ratio*, what would you recommend to church leaders based on the information you developed above?

1. *What teaching groups will be needed?* Considering the *Recommended Maximum Group Size* of thirty,
    - If *all* of the necessary space is available, how many teaching groups do you recommend? ___
    - If space is limited, how many teaching groups do you recommend? ____
2. *How many teachers/workers will be needed?* If one child/adult is needed for each six persons (pupils),
    - How many teachers/workers are needed to provide for *all* of the current enrollment and prospects *(Total Possibilities)*? _____
    - If space is limited, how many workers are needed to provide for the groups you would recommend? ____

3. *Do you think this recommendation is practical?* Explain. _____

_____

4. *What are some other thought or suggestions for improving the ministry to better meet the needs of this age division?* _____

_____

Growth and Improvement Analysis Worksheet—Youth

Youth Division Grades	Current Enrollment	Prospects on File	Total Possibilities	Recommended Maximum Group Size	Teaching Groups Needed	Recommended Student to Adult Ratio	Total Workers Needed
7th Grade				15		4	
8th Grade				15		4	
9th Grade				15		4	
10th Grade				15		4	
11th Grade				15		4	
12th Grade				15		4	

Recommendations: Using the *Recommended Maximum Group Size* and *Recommended Student to Adult Ratio*, what would you recommend to church leaders based on the information you developed above?

1. *What teaching groups will be needed?* Considering the *Recommended Maximum Group Size* of fifteen,
    - How many teaching groups do you recommend if the *all* of the necessary space is available? ____
    - If space is limited, how many teaching groups do you recommend? ____
2. *How many teachers/workers will be needed?* If one teacher/worker is needed for each four persons (pupils),
    - How many teachers/workers are needed to provide for *all* of the current enrollment and prospects *(Total Possibilities)?* ___
    - If space is limited, how many teachers/workers are needed to provide for the groups you would recommend? ____
3. *Do you think this recommendation is practical?* Explain. _____
   _____
4. *What are some other thoughts or suggestions for improving the ministry to better meet the needs of this age division?* _____
   _____

Growth and Improvement Analysis Worksheet—Adult

Adult Division Groups	Current Enrollment	Prospects on File	Total Possibilities	Recommended Maximum Group Size	Teaching Groups Needed	Recommended Pupil to Leader* Ratio	Total Workers Needed
College: 18–24				35		6	
Single: 25 and up				35		6	
Married: 18–24				35		6	
Married: 25–34				35		6	
Married: 35–54				35		6	
Married: 55–64				35		6	
Adult: 65 and up				35		6	

***Notes:**

(a) In *larger churches,* a LeadTeacher and an Apprentice Teacher are recommended. In the worksheet above, Leader includes a teacher, an apprentice teacher, and all class officers such as care group leaders. Adult class job descriptions are provided in Appendix B.

(b) In *smaller churches,* it is recommended that the Maximum Group Size be twenty-five. This helps to avoid administrative problems where a group (class) may tend to become a "voting-block."

(c) To be effective, adult groups should have more than one teacher/facilitator to achieve full potential for reaching, teaching, and ministering. The model suggested here provides for effectively maintaining meaningful life connections among and between group members.

Recommendations: Based on your analysis and using the *Recommended Maximum Group Size* and *Recommended Leader to Pupil Ratio,* what would you recommend to church leaders based on the information you developed above?

1. *How many teaching groups are needed?* If one group (class) is needed for each thirty-five pupils *(Maximum Group Size),*
    - How many teaching groups (classes) are needed for this division if *all* of the space needed is available? _____
    - If there is limited space, how many teaching groups do you recommend? _____
2. *How many leaders are needed?* If one leader is needed for each six persons (pupils),
    - How many leaders are needed to provide for *all* of the current enrollment and prospects *(Total Possibilities)?*

- If space is limited, how many leaders are needed to provide for the groups you would recommend _____

3. *Do you think this recommendation is practical?* Explain. _____

_____

4. *What are some other thoughts or suggestions for improving the ministry to better meet the needs of this age division?* _____

_____

Appendix B



ADULT BIBN STUDY GROUP (CLASS) JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Robby Barrett, D.Min.

Department Director

- Give overall direction and leadership to the department.
- Coordinate special activities and emphases within the department.
- Plan, coordinate, and conduct weekly group activities.
- Enlist and oversee the ministry of the department leadership team.
- Plan and lead workers' meetings.
- Order curriculum materials through the education secretary as needed.
- Seek opportunities to begin new classes within your department.
- Attend directors' meetings and training opportunities.

Department Secretary

- Complete weekly records and return to Sunday School office.
- Assist new members and guests in completing records accurately and completely.
- Assist the department director in ordering curriculum materials.
- Attend workers' meetings and training opportunities.

Teacher

- Serve as Bible study leader.
- Enlist and train class leaders as needed.
- Visit members and prospects on a regular basis.
- Lead members to discover and utilize their spiritual gifts within the life of _____ (church name).
- Equip and encourage members for service in various ministry areas outside the class.
- Regularly encourage class members to leave the class to serve or begin a new class.
- Attend workers' meetings and training opportunities.

Fellowship Leader (Class and/or Department Level)

- Plan and conduct class fellowship opportunities.
- Ensure members and guests are warmly greeted and welcomed during weekly class meetings and additional activities.
- Encourage class members to build relationships with guests and newer members.
- Attend workers' meetings and training opportunities.

Involvement Leader (Class and/or Department Level)

- Encourage participation in mission trips and local mission projects.
- Explore and provide local mission/service opportunities for class members.
- Encourage personal discipleship and growth.
- Communicate and encourage participation in group discipleship opportunities.
- Encourage personal and corporate worship participation.
- Attend workers' meetings and training opportunities.

Apprentice Teacher

- Lead the class and present the lesson as requested by the class teacher.
- Assist the class teacher with various additional duties as needed.
- Meet with the teacher regularly to discuss the work and ministry of the class.

- Be prepared to assume a teaching or other leadership role in a new class.
- Attend workers' meetings and training opportunities.

Class Secretary

- Complete weekly records and return to department secretary or Sunday School office.
- Assist new members and guests in completing records accurately and completely.
- Share overall/individual attendance patterns with class leaders as needed.
- Attend workers' meetings and training opportunities.

Care Leader (Class and/or Department Level)

- Encourage and involve members in ministry action to members and prospects (such as sending birthday and get well cards, sending flowers, and planning and coordinating meals during illness, loss, etc.).
- Contact members and prospects on a regular basis (to learn of their needs).
- Attend workers' meetings and training opportunities.

Prayer Leader (Class and/or Department Level)

- Organize and encourage prayer efforts, both on Sunday mornings and during the week.
- E-mail prayer requests to absentee members.
- E-mail unexpected special requests to all members.
- Attend workers' meetings and training opportunities.

Outreach Leader (Class and/or Department Level)

- Participate in GROW and other church outreach/evangelism efforts.
- Encourage department members to participate in GROW and other church outreach/evangelism efforts.
- Ensure that department visitors and prospects are regularly contacted by members and leaders.

- Encourage class members to regularly share their faith with others.
- Attend workers' meetings and training opportunities.

"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men…It is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (Colossians 3:23—24, NASB).

Notes

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16 In the *Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans*, he wrote, "Let the laity be subject to the deacons; the deacons to the presbyters; the presbyters to

the bishop; the bishop to Christ, even as He is to the Father" (ch. ix). Later in this chapter Ignatius claimed, "Nor is there anyone in the Church greater than the bishop, who ministers as a priest to God for the salvation of the whole world."

17 Williston Walker, professor of ecclesiastical history at Yale University, states that "By the sixth decade of the second century monarchical bishops had become well-nigh universal" *(A History of the Christian Church,* 3d ed. [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970], 42).

18 Irenaeus spoke of "that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops." Then he added, "It is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority" *(Against Heresies* 3:3:2).

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22 *Letters of Martin Luther,* trns. and ed. Margaret A. Currie (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1908), 93; *Table Talk,* trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 346–7.

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accounted men of superior intellect may raise their view, they never can reach its elevated height"; therefore “[God] accommodates himself to our capacity in addressing us” *(Commentary* on 1 Cor. 2:7). But this accommodation in no way lessened the authority of the Scriptures in Calvin’s theology.

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