LEADING EZEKIEL BAPTIST CHURCH IN

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA, FROM

CONGREGATION TO COMMUNITY

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A Project

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by

Brian David King, Sr.

December 2020

APPROVAL SHEET

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PREFACE

I would like to thank my wife, Cynthia, for all her support, love, and encouragement. Without Cynthia, going through this doctoral program would have been more difficult. Cynthia is my best friend. I want to thank the gracious elders and members of the Ezekiel Baptist Church for their prayers, support, and encouragement. I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Matt Haste, and my editor, Betsy, for their guidance and corrections. To my mother, Gertude K. Vance, who was my prayer warrior and encourager who passed this year and was not able to see me earn this doctorate.

Lastly, but most importantly, I want to give God the praise for keeping His word by allowing me to fulfill all requirements for this doctoral program. I would have never made it without the Lord's grace. Without a doubt, I made it because it was His gift, by His grace, for His glory.

<div align="right">Brian King</div>

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

December 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the Christian context, community is rooted in fellowship among like-minded Christians (1 John 1:3).[1] A community is not just a group of people who state values but also a group that lives by those same values. Everyone is held accountable, and no one is exempt (Act 2:42; 1 Cor 5:9-13; 1 Tim 5:19-21). Church leaders are to be an example (1 Pet 5:3). Part of the identity of a church is not how the members are individuals, but how they operate as a community.

Context

The Ezekiel Baptist Church in Philadelphia, a predominantly African-American church, was established in June 1962 by the late Paul McCoy as pastor (1962-1993). Ezekiel Baptist came into existence because the founding members desired a church that elevated God's Word. Ezekiel Baptist currently has over five hundred active members, and before the COVID-19 pandemic, had two Sunday morning services. Ezekiel is a close-knit, family-oriented, obedient to leadership, supportive, and sacrificial church. Ezekiel Baptist has a reputation in Philadelphia for being an active biblio-centric church.

Ezekiel is actively involved with the Southern Baptist Convention. I served two terms as state convention president and four terms as moderator for the Philadelphia Association, now called Philadelphia Baptist Resource Network. Currently, two members serve on SBC entity boards (LifeWay and GuideStone Financial Resources). Multiple members have served on the PA/SNJ Executive Board, as well as state and national committees. Ezekiel's members have served as Sunday School and Vacation Bible

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible.

School consultants, and Ezekiel has conducted and hosted local, state, and national SBC trainings. Ezekiel has received awards from Lifeway for the church with the most baptisms in 2004 and 2005 based on worship size. In 2017, in partnership with PA/SNJ and NAMB, Ezekiel planted its first church in the North East section of Philadelphia.

Ezekiel is very active in its community. Ezekiel has a feeding program in partnership with Philabundance, a local food bank, that feeds over 1,000 persons every week. Additionally, the feeding ministry partners with the University of Pennsylvania's nutrition program, educating the community on nutritional eating. Ezekiel has an accredited recovery ministry that ministers not only to persons with substance abuse, but grief as well. Ezekiel serves as a polling station for elections and allows community organizations that do not conflict with its values to use their building. Ezekiel has a strong partnership with its local politicians by opening up its building when politicians have community interest events. In 2019, Ezekiel received an award from a local non-profit for its work in the community. It has been said that if your church left, would the community miss it? For Ezekiel, the answer to that is yes.

Ezekiel is thriving well as a congregation, but living as a biblical community would make Ezekiel a more effective agent for Christ. A biblical community has life-to-life interactions. Life-to-life means that the members interact so that they positively influence each other to live in harmony. Another distinguishing feature of a biblical community is that its outlook is generational. Generational is not just different ages, but also longevity. A community intends to last past the current members. Because Ezekiel is more congregation than community, it is not experiencing more of the movement of the Holy Spirit.[2] Ezekiel is more of a congregation because the emphasis on life-to-life interactions is low. The desire is for every member of Ezekiel to see what God does when they live as a biblical community.

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[2] Tim Hegg, "A Community or a Congregation: What Are We Striving For?" January 27, 2016, https://messianicpublications.com/tim-hegg/a-community-or-a-congregation-for-what-are-we-striving/.

Ezekiel emphasizes fellowship, discipleship training, and small groups, and had five different prayer meetings every week before the current pandemic. However, something prevents Ezekiel from reaching more of its potential for Christ; namely, being a biblical community.

Rationale

The description of community found in Acts 2:42-47 needs to be demonstrated more at Ezekiel. Acts 2:42-47 illustrates the biblical portrait of a community. Craig Keener writes, "Most scholars recognize four elements in community life (the apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayers)."[3] Ezekiel works well as a congregation, but not as strong in a biblical community sense.

The early church embraced their new community. Their love for God and each other was evident. In an early second-century letter, an anonymous Christian author emphasizes a genuine community.

> For happiness consisteth not in lordship over one's neighbours, nor in desiring to have more than weaker men, nor in possessing wealth and using force to inferiors; neither can any one imitate God in these matters; nay, these lie outside His greatness. But whosoever taketh upon himself the burden of his neighbour, whosoever desireth to benefit one that is worse off in that in which he himself is superior, whosoever by supplying to those that are in want possessions which he received from God becomes a God to those who receive them from him, he is an imitator of God.[4]

The early church is described by Luke in the books of Acts as community that studied, fellowshipped regularly, ate, and prayed together. The church in Acts 2:42-47 lived as a community. The biblical difference between *congregation* and *community* is that a congregation can meet with or without reason.[5] Fellowshipping was common among most first-century cultures during the time of the apostles. However, pagan

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[3] Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1:1000.

[4] J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, eds., *Early Christian Writings Epistle to Diognetus, 10:5-6* , accessed October 20, 2020, http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-lightfoot.html.

[5] G. W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Enclyopedia* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1988), s.v. "congregation."

religions did not come together to worship like the early Christians. What separated Christians from non-Christians was with whom they worshipped and how they lived and fellowshipped. How the early Christians prayed, studied, fellowshipped, and ate together was a drawing power for the non-Christian. David Peterson states, "Their gracious attitude was a significant factor in the turning of many more to Jesus as Lord and Christ."[6] Seeing the intimate relationships between believers caused some non-Christians to investigate this new religion and believe in Christ. Through constant interaction with others, in particular Christians, non-believers were able to see lives committed to Christian living. This evidence of Christ-likeness inspired non-believers to investigate Christian life further. The Epistle to Diognetus says,

> For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. . . . But while they dwell in cities of Greeks and barbarians as the lot of each is cast, and follow the native customs in dress and food and the other arrangements of life, yet the constitution of their own citizenship, which they set forth, is marvellous, and confessedly contradicts expectation.[7]

In the first and second centuries, the church emerged with its own communal identity and distinguished itself from Jewish and secular Greek and Roman backgrounds.

A community, however, cannot remain without a commitment from its members. In *The Compelling Community*, Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop state that "commitment is foundational to community."[8] They stress that relationships within the church flourish through a commitment to one another, and a commitment to the mission of the church. Dever and Dunlop describe the church in Acts 2: "They were all together, bound into a fellowship by the same ideas (the apostles' teaching), by the same practices (the breaking of bread), by the same religious habits (prayers), and by the same economic

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[6] David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), Acts 2:42, WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[7] Lightfoot and Harmer, *Early Christian Writings, Epistle to Diognetus, 5:1, 4.*

[8] Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 52.

rights and responsibilities (and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need)."[9]

The need for community among believers is crucial for the stability and growth of the church of Jesus Christ. Gilbert Bilezikian asserts,

> Our innate need for community is so intense that once a spark of interest is ignited and a glimpse of God's dream for community is captured, a burning passion for community can spread like wildfire. When this happens, people begin, in true revival form, to tend their private communion with God. Then they clean up their church and family relationships, meet other people's desires and their church and family relationships. They seek to become servants to others, to be sensitive to needs, to meet other people's desires and wants, to care and to share, to give and to receive, to forgive and to be forgiven.[10]

Bilezikian observes the actions of Christians when they are committed to the community. Biblical community changes the actions and attitudes of believers. Bilezikian writes, "In our day, there is a clamor for the church to rediscover its identity as community. Many Christian leaders bemoan the act that the church has lost its basic biblical definition as divinely designed community."[11]

God has plans for Ezekiel Baptist. However, for those plans to be achieved, the Holy Spirit must be able to operate, and Ezekiel Baptist must become a healthy community. When Ezekiel Baptist becomes a community, changes will occur. One of the tenants of the gospel of Jesus is transformation. God does not just want to save people. He also wants to transform them. Jesus went so far as to say that men would know whom His disciples were by loving each other (John 13:35).

If those outside Christianity cannot see transformation among Christians, they have no enticement to change, or worse, have no hope that there is a better life. Community is vital for the success of Ezekiel Baptist's part in kingdom work. Seeing Ezekiel displaying life-to-life interactions allows those outside of Christ to see God's

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[9] Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*, 52.

[10] Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 182.

[11] Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 11.

design for His church. Like the observers in Acts 2:47, so too is the possibility that those whom Ezekiel evangelizes will come to Christ. Community within Ezekiel can be achieved when it is in one place and in one accord. When the singleness of mind returns, the Holy Spirit will be free to pour Himself out into the church as He did in Acts 2:1-2.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to lead Ezekiel Baptist Church from being a congregation to being a community.

Goals

Three goals determined if Ezekiel had started this movement toward a more biblical community.

1. The first goal was to assess the stated and actual beliefs of Ezekiel Baptist Church as they pertained to community.

2. The second goal was to increase the church's understanding of what community means in a biblical context.

3. The third goal was to work with a group of key leaders to produce a new vision statement for the church that reflected an understanding of a biblical community.

Research Methodology

It was necessary to first identify EBC's culture before changing it. Determining the artifacts of EBC were crucial in understanding EBC. Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck define artifacts as when the "church culture are the visible, tangible expressions of a church's actual and articulated beliefs."[12]

Three goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess the stated and actual values of Ezekiel Baptist Church as they pertained to community. Ezekiel's mission statement sets the stated values (artifacts) of the church. This goal was measured by how ten church leaders (elders, deacons, ministry leaders, and influential lay) identified the stated and actual values of Ezekiel through a survey. This

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[12] Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 127.

goal was considered successfully met when the ten participants completed survey 1 (pre-survey). The survey was analyzed to identify the stated and actual values.[13]

The second goal was to increase the church's understanding of what community means in a biblical context by using Acts 2:42-47. The change desired cannot come unless Ezekiel understands how community impacts the culture. This goal was accomplished by gathering a group of ten key representative leaders to complete the four-week study. Ten diverse congregation members consisted of elders, trustee, deacon, ministry head, and those who are not serving in a leadership capacity. The group went through a four-week small group training on a biblical community, as observed in Acts 2:42-47 and a series of sermons preached on biblical community. Members who participated in this training took a survey following the last session. The results of the pre- and post-surveys were compared using a t-test to see if the participant's views on community changed significantly.

The third goal was to produce a new vision statement for the church. This goal was considered successful when the ten participants reached an agreement on a new vision statement for the church that better aligned with a biblical vision for community.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

To assist the reader in understanding this project, the following definitions are provided.

Community. A *community* is a group of people who follow set truths (Bible) and believe that "truth cannot endure apart from life-to-life interactions having "a generational (longevity) element at its core."[14]

This study was delimited to the members of Ezekiel Baptist Church 18 and older. Changing Ezekiel from a congregation to a community was the focus of this study.

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[13] See appendix 1 for survey. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

[14] Hegg, "A Community or a Congregation."

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The findings of this study are generalizable to only Ezekiel but could be transferrable to other churches that want to go from a congregation to community.

This project was limited due to the coronavirus pandemic. The original project intended for a survey conducted prior to the sermon series; however, restrictions on the assembly of groups placed by the mayor of Philadelphia and the governor of Pennsylvania prevented the collection of data from the congregation.

Conclusion

Bilezikian writes, "Community is deeply grounded in the nature of God. Because he is community, he creates community. Therefore, the making of community may not be regarded as an arbitrary decision for Christians."[15] This project laid the foundation for real culture change in Ezekiel. The stated values of Ezekiel must match the actual values if its will be effective for the long term. Chapter 2 expounds how community is viewed in Scriptures.

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[15] Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 27.

CHAPTER 2

WHY COMMUNITY IS IMPORTANT

Community is important to God because God Himself exists as community. Biblical community is rooted in the communal nature of God. The doctrine of the Trinity supports the belief in the communal nature of God. Both the Old Testament and New Testaments confirm the Trinity.[1]

The Bible provides a developing picture of a biblical community. As a community, the church proclaims Christ as the Messiah and reflects the image of Christ in how it loves (John 13:35; Rom 8:29). Acts 2:42-47 provides a clear and compelling portrait of a New Testament community. These reflections are vital to help EBC move from congregation to community.

What Is a Biblical Community?

To understand the reason why Ezekiel Baptist Church needs to go from being a congregation to become a healthier community, there must first be an understanding of the differences between a congregation and a community. The biblical difference between *congregation* and *community* is that a congregation can meet with or without reason.[2] Merrill Unger writes, *congregation*, in its strictest definition, takes on the

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[1] Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. *(*New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Allen C. Meyers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

[2] G. W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1988), s.v. "congregation."

meaning of assembly.[3] *Community* not only takes on the meaning of an assembly but also a way of living as a group. Tim Hegg[4] writes,

> The foundational difference is this: a "congregation" is primarily concerned with the present and near future; a "community," while concerned with the present, always has a generational element as its core. To put it simply: a community takes seriously the repeated phrase: throughout all your generations" found in the Torah. It is this generational perspective that drives a community to be what it ought to be. Likewise, this generational aspect affects every major decision of the community, for the highest goal of a community is to remain faithful to its core values—from generation to generation. . . . What distinguishes a congregation and a community is the method by which each intends to reach this goal. A congregation puts the majority of its efforts into cognitive endeavors: Getting people to agree with the truth is thought to assure longevity of the core values. A community also stresses the need to confess the truth (cognition) but believes that the truth cannot endure apart from the life-to-life interactions that spans generations (relationships).[5]

God established the church as a community. How the church worshipped God had congregational elements, but the emphasis for Yahweh was to have a people who lived as one with Him and each other. To accomplish this new type of community desired by God, the Jews would have to live as a community. God established His church to be different in how Christians worship Him and how Christians live on this earth. Just as the Jews had to leave Egypt to serve God properly, so too the church has been commanded, "Come out from among them and be separate" (2 Cor 6:17). It will later be discussed in this chapter the differences between the religions of the apostle's time and the church. Generally speaking, *congregation*/*community* has the idea of a witness, but in the Torah,

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[3] Merrill Unger, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary, congregation* (Chicago: Moody, 1957), s.v. "congregation," Wordsearch CROSS e-book.

[4] Tim Hegg is the president and instructor of The TorahResource Institute. Hegg has an MDiv and ThM from Northwest Baptist Seminary in Tacoma, WA. He has taught Biblical Hebrew and Hebrew Exegesis. He is a member of The Evangelical Theological Society and The Society of Biblical Literature. He is an author of multiple books and has written academic papers. Hegg ministers to the Messianic Community. Torah Resource Staff, accessed October 14, 2020, https://torahresource.com/about/torahresource-staff/.

[5] Tim Hegg, "A Community or a Congregation: What Are We Striving For?" January 27, 2016, https://messianicpublications.com/tim-hegg/a-community-or-a-congregation-for-what-are-we-striving/.

as Hegg suggests, it is "a group with a common testimony."[6] The church, too, has its distinctiveness in its testimony of Jesus being the Messiah.

What initially impressed the observers of the early church was the multiple ways the church demonstrated community. This new community was so captivating that fear came upon unbelievers because of the signs and miracles done by the apostles. As a result, the early church gained favor with all the people, and some became believers (Acts 2:47). God uses unity to draw people to Himself. God wanted His people to be a community to demonstrate to the heathen His power.

In conclusion, a biblical community seeks to obey the Word of God through worship and living together by life-to-life interactions that go from generation to generation. Additionally, a distinctive biblical community evokes a response from unbelievers and Christ. The next section discusses how the church lives in community.

Community in the Church

Acts 2:42-47 shows a model for what a Christian community can look like. The early church understood the need to live as a different community than what was currently existing. The church demonstrated their community by their unity.

A Characteristic of Community

A central theme to a community is oneness. In Jesus' intercessory prayer in John 17, Jesus explicitly asks the Father that "they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." In this prayer, the church discovers one of the primary reasons for a healthy community. Jesus designed His church to be a witness for Him. The unbeliever will come to Christ not only through the leading of the Father (John 6:44), the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8), and the Word of God (Rom 10:9-10) but also through how the church acts unified (John 17:21-23).

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[6] Hegg, "A Community or a Congregation."

Like Jesus, the Father wants the church to be one. The Holy Spirit wants the church to be one (Eph 4:3). The Father sent Jesus to make man one with them through Jesus' sacrificial death and atonement. What can be seen in this prayer is the motivation God had for sending Jesus. God wanted to be one with His believers. There is no difference between the Father and the Son (John 14:9). Separation from His human creation displeased God.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is necessary for unity among the church. In Acts 2:1-2, Luke describes the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit did not come *until* all were in one place and on one accord (*homothumadón*). Thus, all in the upper room had the same intention. Luke had in view the understanding and commitment to Jesus' command and authority to go and make disciples. It took ten days of being locked up together in an upper room after Christ's ascension to arrive at this conclusion. No doubt much was discussed as to the next steps of following Christ's teachings. However, in Acts 1:12-26, when the disciples and the rest made up their minds as a group that they were united in doing Christ's plan, the Holy Spirit came (Acts 2:1-4)

When the disciples and the rest in the upper room presented themselves before the gathering of Jews, and as Peter spoke to the crowd, they displayed a unified front. Despite the doubt in the hearers' minds (Acts 2:12-13), the disciples were united, not in a phony or deceitful way but in a determined way. The crowd was fixated on Peter's words as he preached the gospel and listened with conviction. Just as Jesus prophesied in John 16:8, the Holy Spirit persuaded the listeners to the point that when Peter finished proclaiming the gospel, the question of the ages was asked—the question God was looking for and the result of the convicting Holy Spirit—the listeners asked Peter and the rest of the disciples, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

With instruction given by the disciples, the listeners complied, and as a result, God added three thousand souls to the church. It is therefore not surprising that these people became unified through teaching, fellowship, prayer, and worship since the Holy

Spirit laid the foundation. Grudem writes about the work of the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit's work is to complete and sustain what God the Father has planned and what God the Son has begun."[7] When following the direction of the Holy Spirit, the Christian community remains unified. Conversely, decisions made without the Holy Spirit can allow division to occur.

Most striking about the early church is how they lived as a community by being obedient to the Holy Spirit's direction. Acts 2:42-47 describes how they worshipped, prayed, studied, and fellowshipped as one. After Peter's sermon, Luke takes his narrative to the resulting belief of those listening. Had Luke finished the story at the end of the sermon and baptism of the three thousand converts, the reader would have missed the resulting work of the gospel. Peter's sermon, however, pricked the hearts of the listeners. After being baptized, the apostles had more work to do. The new believer's life was no longer to be the same. F. F. Bruce writes,

> Baptized, the new believers entered upon the common life of Christians, of which four staple constituents are mentioned: the teaching of the apostles, fellowship, common meals, and prayer. . . . These observations go far towards explaining Luke's motivation. In addition, the summaries confirm his central them of the triumph, the irresistible progress of the word of God. The Gospel is accepted by more and more people, and the quality of Christian life is maintained and developed in-depth and intensity.[8]

The church of Jesus is a congregation that lives in community.

Community Seen in Acts 2:42-47

Apostle's Teaching

For unity in the Christian community essential sources are needed. The essential resources are given in Acts 2:42-47: obedience to God's Word, fellowship and breaking bread, and prayer. The first thing Luke records in verse 42 was how the early

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[7] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 635.

[8] F. F Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Critical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 160.

church remained steadfast in the apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.

Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider comment that the "devotion" Luke chronicles is "unflinching perseverance."[9] The community of believers was united not only in hearing the apostles' teaching but in acting out their lives what they heard. Darrell Bock writes, "Community life is summarized as involving four key areas: apostolic teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread together, and prayer."[10]

Luke provides the motivation for this devotion: "Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and mind." (Acts 4:32a) These believers became of one heart and soul because they developed community through their devotion to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. The apostles' teaching undoubtedly contained what Jesus commanded them in Matthew 19:20.

The early church's community was first theological, then social. Luke emphasized how the church dedicated themselves to the apostles' teachings. Fundamental to a community is having a singular purpose. The church was steadfast in the apostles' teachings. The early church did not deviate from what the apostles initially taught. However, Paul's writings inform that there was a deviation from the gospel.

The teaching of the Word of God is not without its attacks from false teachers. The apostle Paul warned the elders in Ephesus against false teachers after his departure: "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). A strategy of Satan in attacking the church is bringing disunity through false teachers. Satan used an effective strategy when

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[9] Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), s.v. "devotion," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[10] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), "C. Summary: Community Life," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

tempting Eve in the Garden. Satan put doubt in Eve's mind when he asked, "did God really say" (Gen 3:1) Then Satan followed up with, "no, you will not die" (Gen 3:4).

Just like sound teaching can unify a church, false teaching will bring division. As the early church followed the apostles' teaching, unification commenced. However, it did not take long before erroneous and heretical teaching found its way into the church. In Galatians 1:6, Paul criticizes the church because they left the actual instructions of the gospel. The early church dealt with the false doctrine of being circumcised to be saved (Gal 5:2, 6:15). The apostles understood that the unity of the message of Christ was tantamount in preserving the community. In Acts 15, the church debated the issue of circumcision for salvation. The church leaders decided that circumcision was not needed for salvation; however, the leader instructed the people to abstain from meat offered to idols and reframe from sexual impurity. The apostolic teaching was based on truth while Satan's teaching used lies (John 8:44). The early church embraced the truth; consequently, they were unified.

The persuasiveness of the church is in its proper Christological teachings and adherence to them. The unity of the church relies on not just proper instruction, but also on the application of that teaching. The foundation for changing the culture of the church was its adherence to the teachings of the apostles.

Fellowship

The second observation in which Luke notes is how the church was devoted to fellowship. These new converts valued meeting together continually, not just for worship and prayer, but for relationship development. To the apostles, the fellowship was a hallmark of being a follower of Christ. John writes, "That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim to also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). John makes this point clear: if one is not in fellowship with other believers, he may not be in fellowship

with the Father and the Son. The early believers were in fellowship with God and each other.

The word for fellowship used in Acts 2:42 is κοινωνια, which commonly means *communion.*[11] *The Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary* defines κοινωνια as "involved in this relationship is a readiness to share, a sense of equality among the participants, and a unity among the members."[12] The early church exemplified this type of fellowship. Fellowship was a distinguishing feature of the early church. The fellowship the early church had stood out among non-believers. Bock writes, "Luke points to fellowship to underscore the personal interactive character of relationships in the early church, at all . . . there is a real sense of connection to, between, and for each other."[13]

Two observations about fellowship by the church are seen in Acts 2:42-47. The first observation is the purpose of this new-found fellowship was not a "social club" type of atmosphere but a fellowship because of a new life. A fellowship based on a common faith and that faith was found in the Messiah, Jesus. C. K. Barrett writes, "They continued in faithful adherence to the newly formed community of those who had accepted that Jesus was the Messiah and the belief that God's salvation of his people was being put into effect through Him."[14] Belief in Jesus gave commonality to the early church.

The second observation is that holiness was a basis for the fellowship. Barrett explains that by "devoted themselves to turning from all evil, and to adhering to all that he commanded according to his good pleasure: to separate from the congregation of the

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[11] A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), s.v. "fellowship."

[12] Donald F. Vinyard, Dennis W. Williams, 2815 κοινωνία Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary Vol 13, - Zeta-Kappa. 2176-2947 Springfield MO: Complete Biblical Library 1991.

[13] Bock, *Acts*, "C. Summary: Community Life (2:42-47)."

[14] C. K. Barrett, *Acts 1*-14, vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary On The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 164.

men of iniquity."[15] In writing to the church in Corinth, Paul challenged their adherence to being separate from the world in how they worshipped and lived. Paul asks, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Cor 6:14). Fellowship in the early church, therefore, was centered around Christ and holiness.

The practice of this type of fellowship was far-reaching and impressive to the outside community. The idea of universal fellowship, where all were equal, and all shared in the same thing, was contrary to Roman and Greek practices. J. W. McGarvey writes, "The radical idea in this term is that of *participation in common.*"[16] The impact of this fellowship became an effective witness to the unsaved and approval to the Lord, so much so that He added to the church (Acts 2:47). There is some disagreement among theologians as to the application of κοινωνια in this context. McGarvey explains, "It has been urged by some writers, that the term κοινωνια should here be rendered *contribution,* instead of *fellowship*, and that it refers to contributions which were made in the public assemblies for the poor."[17]

Therefore, κοινωνια is challenging to contextualize in Acts 2:42 because there are different usages. Pohill writes, "This Greek phrase is notoriously difficult to translate, occurring five times in Acts (1:15; 2:1, 44, 47; 4:26)."[18] Adding to the challenge, Barrett states that there are four possible meanings for κοινωνια: fellowship with the apostles,

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[15] Barrett*, Acts 1-14*, 164.

[16] J. W. McGarvey, *A Commentary on Acts of Apostles*, 7th ed. (Lexington KY: Transylvania Printing and Publishing, 1872), "Acts II," WORD*search* CROSS e-book, emphasis original.

[17] McGarvey, *A Commentary on Acts of Apostles,* "Acts II."

[18] J. B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 118.

communism, breaking of bread, and equivalent to alms-giving.[19] Of the nineteen times κοινωνια is used in the New Testament, Paul uses it thirteen times.[20]

Central to fellowship is having the same mind. Robert Banks writes, "Paul's emphasis is on their participation *alongside* one another in such things."[21] Additionally, in Philippians 2:1-4, the apostle Paul instructs the church on the proper attitudes and conduct for believers.

The church would short-circuit the goals of the Christian community by not conducting themselves with the same mind of Christ. Paul instructs the church to have the same mind. Having the same mind is defined as having fellowship with the Spirit, having affection (inner) and mercy, the same love, one accord, and one mind.[22] Why did the apostle Paul instruct believers in this way? Since God operates in unity, so too must the believer. What makes a community a community is not just having stated values but also how they act. The unity described by Paul in Philippians 2:1-4 is unachievable without the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, all believers can work, worship, have fellowship, and pray together. Therefore, Paul writes in Ephesians 4:3 to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

In Philippians 2:2, Paul uses "thinking" twice. The first *think* is to "think the same." The second time it is used as a participle. The idea expressed is first to think the same and then keep on thinking the same. Changes occur when the group shifts from believing the same. Changes can either be good or bad for a community. However, for the sake of community longevity, the thinking must remain the same. Thinking the same

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[19] Barrett, *Acts 1-14*, 163.

[20] Donald F. Vinyard, Denis W. Williams, *Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary,*. 2176-2947, Complete Biblical Library. 1991. κοινωνία

[21] Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early Churches in Their Cultural Settings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 57.

[22] Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on The New Testament 2:1-4 (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1995), Phil 2:1-4, WORDsearch CROSS e-book

does not mean a community cannot make necessary changes to survive, but the community must agree on those changes.

The English interpretation of "one accord" is also noteworthy. In Greek, the word for accord is σύμψυχος (*sumpsuchoi*). *Sumpsuchoi* is a combination of two words, *sum* and *psuche*. These two words combined mean as Robertson writes, "harmonious in soul, souls that beat together, in tune with Christ and with each other."[23] Fellowship enjoyed by the early church occurred because they were united in their fellowship through Christ the Messiah, a dedication to holiness, and having the same mind.

Breaking of the Bread

The next observation Luke makes about the early church is the breaking of the bread. The breaking of bread has its disagreements among commentators as it will now be noted. The interpretations range from communion (Eucharist), typical meal or both. There are convincing arguments for communion and meals. Alexander MacLaren explains,

> Commentators who can only see one thing at a time—and there are a good many of that species—have got up great discussions as to whether this phrase means eating ordinary meals or partaking of the Lord's Supper. I venture to say it means both because, clearly Supper being associated with it, and every day's evening repast was eaten in remembrance of Him.[24]

With the use of the article, Boice believes it "is a reference to something formal."[25] Since there is a formality here, it would not make sense to interpret the text as a typical meal such as lunch or dinner. Additionally, in Acts 20:7, it was recorded how the church met weekly to break bread together.

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[23] A. M. Robertson and Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), "being of one accord Philippians 2:2," WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

[24] Alexander MacLaren, *The Acts of the Apostles 1-12* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907), "Acts II," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[25] James Montgomery Boice, *Acts*, Boice Expositional Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), chap. 6 "A Model Church," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

Hans Conzelmann writes,

> When Luke speaks of the breaking of bread he does not mean only the rite at the beginning of the meal, but rather the meal itself (cf. 20:7*). Do we have evidence here for a second type of Lord's Supper which is pre-Pauline (Lietzmann)? In considering this question it should be noted that Luke is thinking of the ordinary daily meal here, but he does not make a distinction between it and the Eucharist. The unity of the two is part of the ideal picture of the earliest church.[26]

Stanley Toussaint surmises, "Perhaps the breaking of bread included both the Lord's Table and a common meal (Acts 2:46; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23-25; Jude 12)."[27] Fausset and Brown write, "Sharing in the fellowship meals (in Greek literally "in the breaking of bread") represents a Greek phrase which occurs only here and in Luke 24:35. It is generally agreed that these fellowship meals were common meals shared in by the early Christian community and followed by the celebration of the Lord's Supper."[28]

Whether breaking of bread means communion (Eucharist) or a meal is inconsequential. The emphasis of Luke's writing is how the church devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship. More than likely, communion was supplementary to the evening meal.[29]

As the church grew, additional concerns developed. In 1 Corinthians 11, how the church in Corinth was breaking bread was troublesome to Paul. Paul rebuked the Corinthians because of their lack of respect for the Lord and others who had come to fellowship (1 Cor 11:17-34). In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul is talking about two different meals. Paul references the Lord's body and eating a meal at home and is criticizing the church in Corinth. Paul concluded that the believers in Corinth were disrespecting the

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[26] Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia, trans. James. Limburg, A. Thomas. Kraabel, and Donald. H. Juel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 23.

[27] Stanley. D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John . F. Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 2:360

[28] Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 2:176

[29] Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 2:176.

Lord's body because they were drunk or eating a meal in front of another hungry believer without offering any of their meals. Concluding his rebuking of the church, Paul commands, "If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home" (1 Cor 11:34a).

Luke is attempting to describe how the church fellowshipped. Whether "breaking of bread" meant communion or starting a meal after asking for the table blessing is immaterial. The breaking of bread is best interpreted as being both the Lord's body and eating a meal, based on the transition of the church. As the church progressed, the two became separated. However, at the time of the writing of Acts, it is logical to believe that Luke had the eucharist and eating a meal in mind. It is hard to believe that Luke is only talking about a regular meal. The early Christians knew what it meant to break bread because they rejoiced in it and lived it. What made the church unified was that they fellowshipped, with commonality in mind. They saw themselves as a new community of believers.

This new community of believers would live according to different teaching and fellowship corporately, and this different fellowship included how they ate. Hans Conzelmann writes, "The narrator is not merely idealistic; he is attempting to portray the immediate crystallization of a large and smoothly functioning community."[30] The early church demonstrated unity in their fellowship. The breaking of bread allowed the church to show community to others, and the daily fellowship strengthened them. Besides the breaking of bread, how the church prayed together helped demonstrate community.

Prayer

The last part of Acts 2:42 displays how the church devoted themselves to prayers. *Prayer* in Greek is in the plural. The prayers were spontaneous, a collection of prayers, both Jewish and Christian. Barclay Neuman and Eugene Nida write, "The prayers which the disciples shared in were probably not limited to the prayers of the Christian

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[30] Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), "2:42-47: A Summary," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

community only, but likely included as well the Jewish prayer at their stated hours (see 3:1)."[31] Bock explains, "A community at prayer is something Luke emphasizes about community life. . . . The plural with the article ("the prayers") could suggest that some set prayers were used. Another option is that the expression refers to an entire range of praying, both set and more spontaneous."[32] Therefore, quite possibly, the early church used multiple prayers.

God expects the church to pray in community because He intercedes in community. The way the Bible describes the Trinity's involvement in prayer demonstrates community. In Romans 8:26-27, believers are informed about the role the Holy Spirit plays in their prayers. Christ intercedes for all believers (Rom 8:34). Finally, the Holy Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Rom 8:27).

The Holy Spirit is needed to intercede because of the believer's weakness. Since the Holy Spirit "knows the mind of God," He can convert prayers to be in harmony with God's will. Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier write, "When the Father hears his will being prayed by the Spirit (*because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will*), then the Father and Spirit are in perfect harmony for the purposes of God to be accomplished in the believer through the instrument of prayer."[33]

Robert Jewett and Roy Kotansky write "The Spirit 'in a similar way also' stands alongside the saints as they persevere, guiding their most decisive intervention into

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[31] Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1972), 62.

[32] Bock, *Acts*, "C. Summary: Community Life (2:42-47)."

[33] Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), "E. A New Life: Based on the Purpose of God (8:26-30)," WORD*search* CROSS e-book, emphasis original.

the fallen world, namely, their prayer."[34] Not only is the Holy Spirit active in the believer's prayer life, so too is Christ.

The second person of the Trinity serves as an intercessor for the believer. Hebrews 7:25 informs the reader, "Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them." The finished work of Christ secures the believer's salvation forever. For salvation to remain forever, Christ takes on the role of intercessor. Iain Duguid writes, "Yet he still carries on another crucial priestly role, that of *intercessory prayer* on behalf of his people. This he does without ceasing. His petitions, uniquely combining suffering-wrought compassion and obedience-demonstrated integrity (2:17-18; 4:14-16), receive God's approval and positive response (Rom. 8:34)."[35] Since the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in community, the intercessory work of Christ secures the believer. Just like the Holy Spirit prays with the knowledge of God, Jesus prays on behalf of the believer with the knowledge of God. The intercessory work of Christ is ongoing since "he always lives to intercede for them." The interconnection of the Trinity in prayer demonstrates community within the Godhead. Therefore, the church, which is the body of Christ, is expected to pray in community and be ceaseless like God. The final centerpiece of community in the church is *how* they prayed. Acts 2:42 recalls that they prayed together without ceasing.

The prayers of the early church were both public and private. However, it must be noted the that the early church met together to pray as a community. Again, they devoted themselves to prayer. They were incessant in prayer. The apostles obeyed Christ's instructions. During their training by Jesus, He gave them a parable about the

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[34] Robert Jewett and Roy D. Kotansky, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), "8:18-30; Thesis and Rationale Concerning the Hopeful Sufferings of the Children of God," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[35] Iain M. Duguid, *Hebrews-Revelation*, ESV Expository Commentary, vol. 12 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), "Hebrews 7:11-28," WORD*search* CROSS e-book, emphasis original.

importance of praying without ceasing (Luke 11:5-11, 18:1-8). In Luke 11, ask, seek, and knock are in the participle. Thus, Jesus is saying to keep asking, seeking, and knocking.

Additionally, the apostle Paul encouraged the church to pray without ceasing (Rom 12:12; Eph 6:18; Col 4:2; 1 Thess 5:17). The effect of the church's prayer life was the strengthening of the members, and the unsaved took notice to the point that some joined the church (Acts 2:46-47).

Filled with Awe

Luke records in Acts 2:43, "Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles." The apostles, through wonders and signs, caused reactions from both believers and non-believers. The awe observed was because of the working of God through the apostles. Newman and Nida write, "One should note that the apostles are not spoken of as the primary agents of the miracles, but only as the secondary ones. God himself is the initiator, and he works through the apostles."[36] Translating whether this verse means awe or fear can be difficult. It is difficult to determine if "awe" (CSB, ESV, NIV) or "fear" (ASV, KJV) because the word φόβος (phobos) can be translated afraid or respect.[37] Spence-Jones theorizes,

> Fear came, etc. This seems to be spoken of the awe which fell upon the whole people, and restrained them from interfering with the disciples. Just as at the first settlement of Israel in the land of Canaan God laid the fear of them and the dread of them upon all the land (Deut. 11:25), so now the fear engendered by the events on the day of Pentecost, by the signs and wonders which followed and by the wonderful unity and holiness of the newborn Church, so wrought upon every soul at Jerusalem that all enmity was paralyzed, and the disciples had time to multiply and to consolidate and establish themselves before the storm of persecution fell upon them.[38]

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[36] Newman and Nida, *A Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles*, 63

[37] Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1993), s.v. "phobos," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[38] Henry D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Acts of the Apostles* (Vol. 1) (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1909), 55.

All Things Common

Luke now expands on verse 43 by telling how the early church looked out for each other. The belief that Acts 2:44 is stating that the early church sold all their possessions is incorrect. Verse 44 says, "All things common." All things common is known as "community of goods." Community of goods is described by James Orr:

> The inference from this, that there was an absolute disposal of all the property of all the members of the church, and that its proceeds were contributed to a common fund, has been disputed upon the ground that the example of Barnabas in selling "a field" for this purpose (Acts4:37) would not have been mentioned, if this had been the universal rule. . . . No commandment, of which record has been preserved, prescribed any such course. It came from the spontaneous impulse of the sense of brotherhood in Christ, when the band of disciples was still small, making them in a sense one family, and under the external constraint of extreme want and persecution. So much there was, that they realized, under such conditions they had in common, that they were ready to extend this to all things.[39]

Some may interpret the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira for not giving up their land, but Peter, in pronouncing judgment says, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds of the land? Wasn't it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn't it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God" (Acts 5:3-4). Peter tells Ananias he was under no command to sell. The choice to sell and the amount to give was at his discretion. The way the early church gave is evidence that those who gave did so willingly, which is why Paul instructed the Corinthians not to give reluctantly or out of compulsion (2 Cor 9:7)

Another group had a similar belief of the early church on the sharing of possessions. The Essenes were a Jewish group that existed during the time of Acts 2:42-47. The Essenes demanded their members give up all property to be a part of the community. Josephus writes,

> Since [they are] despisers of wealth—their communal stock is astonishing—one cannot find a person among them who has more in terms of possessions. "For by a law, those coming into the school must yield up their funds to the order, with the result that in all [their ranks] neither the humiliation of poverty nor the superiority of

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[39] James Orr, "Community of Goods," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, accessed October 23, 2020, https://biblehub.com/topical/c/community_of_goods.htm.

wealth is detectable, but the assets of each one have been mixed in together, as if they were brothers, to create one fund for all."[40]

The difference between the Essenes and the church in giving was that the church's giving was voluntary and spontaneous out of a relationship with God and each other. The Essenes gave because it was their law. Second, many church members maintain their property after giving (Acts 4:36-37, 5:1-4), while the Essenes had to give up their property to be a part of the community.[41]

With the early church, the call was for everyone to look out for each other. They epitomized Philippians 2:3-4: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." Selfishness derails a community, and the early church was not selfish. Because the early church shared with joy, they made sure all the believers' needs were satisfied. God gives every church the resources needed for ministry and charity (Phil 4:19)

The apostles were encouraged by witnessing the giving of the believers. When the people gave, they laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:35, 37, 5:2). Laying their gifts at the apostles' feet was a sign of humility and trust. Additionally, early Christians gave sacrificially when God moved them, and they loved each other and trusted their leadership.

The motivation for selling their possessions is the belief that Jesus was coming back soon. The selling of possessions was not Christian Communism. Kenneth Gangel writes, "Their work also included learning how to live and love together. They sold their possessions and made sure everybody had plenty. Communism? Absolutely not—this was voluntary, contemporary, and discretionary."[42]

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[40] Biblical Archaeology Staff, "Josephus on the Essenes" May 10, 2020, https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-artifacts/dead-sea-scrolls/josephus-on-the-essenes/.

[41] Biblical Archaeology Staff, "Josephus on the Essenes."

[42] Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 31-32.

Believers need to understand that God gives resources for the benefit of His church. The moving of the Spirit allowed this generosity to happen. They were motivated by their love for Christ, which spread to each other. A biblical community exemplifies generous giving done cheerfully (2 Cor 8:14-15, 9:7)

The Lord Added

Luke concludes verses 42-45 with the results in verses 46-47. Because of the church's faithfulness to the Lord and each other, God gives them favor and adds to the church. F. F. Bruce writes, "It is the Lord's prerogative to add new members to his own community; it is the joyful prerogative of existing members to welcome to their fellowship those whom he has accepted."[43] A characteristic of this church is they did all the sharing with joy and humility. These verses are a template for the church today. When any church of Jesus remains devoted to Christ's teachings, fellowship by worshipping and having "all things common", and praying, they can expect God to move mightily. Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 9:7, "Go, eat your bread with pleasure, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already accepted your works." God accepted the works of the apostles and the early church.

Jamison, Fausset, and Brown write,

> The single discriminating principle of its few members was that they all recognized the crucified Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. This confession would have been a thing of no importance, if it had only presented itself as a naked declaration, and would never in such a case have been able to form a community that would spread itself over the whole Roman empire.[44]

The early church gained favor from all because they applied the apostle's teaching in their lives.

The Lord was adding to His church daily, and the early church rejoiced. Acts 2:42-47 shows what a model church can be if its focus is on the Word, fellowshipping

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[43] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 73-75.

[44] Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, 2:176

through worship and eating meals, having the same heart, and looking out for the needs of others. Ezekiel Baptist Church has earmarks of the early church mentioned in Acts 2:42-47; however, as a church being consistent will allow them to become a biblical community. Acts 2:42-47 gives evidence that the Lord works significantly

Community Handling Challenges

Despite the unity of the early church, it still had challenges. A problem facing the church is how they handled challenges as a community. This section will examine how the early church handled potential conflict as a community. Previous discussion focused on the success of early church because they devoted themselves to the Word, fellowship, prayer, and breaking bread. In their fellowshipping, they met the needs of all believers. However, this community would now face new challenges to their fellowship. This section will discuss how a biblical community handles issues.

Handling issues can be challenging when in a community. Differences in opinions arise because of various worldviews; some differences are small, and others are substantial. What matters is that addressed adequately, the differences will help maintain unity.

The early church had potentially divisive issues as well. In Acts 6, the Grecian widows complained about how the Hebrew widows were better treated. This perceived mistreatment could have been an explosive issue for the church. If this issue was not solved in a godly way, then those who were observing the church could have formed the opinion that there was discrimination among members. The apostles acted in unity rather than avoiding the issue. First, they identified the priority of Christ (Acts 6:2, 4). Second, they assigned men to oversee the problem (Acts 6:3). As a result, the whole multitude was pleased (Acts 6:5), the apostles continued doing their ministry, *and* the number of disciples multiplied (Acts 6:7).

By the time the apostles wrote their letters to the maturing churches, it was apparent that divisive issues had arisen. The church was growing, and as a result, more

worldviews were coming in. The apostles' strategy was to return the followers to the teachings of Christ. Pointedly, the apostles reminded the followers of Christ's example and His teachings. By keeping Christ in front of them, the followers could combat the attacks of the world and Satan.

One who declares to be a member of a particular church, by Christ's intention and practiced by the apostles, was under the authority of the local church. This submission of the member, in part, allows for the community. Hegg writes, "Those who view themselves as part of a community have made a long-term, generational commitment to that community, and therefore, are willing to endure difficulties and circumstances that require greater faith, humility, patience and the exercise of genuine love to others (which often involves forgiving others)."[45]

The hallmark of community is how members are committed to each other, and to the purpose for which they have embraced. The Christian community distinguishes itself from non-Christians by faithfulness to what they believe, and how that belief impacts their relationships with each other. Each member of the congregation must be mindful of how his or her actions will affect the entire group.

In 1 Corinthians 1:10, the church is appealed to by the apostle Paul to reverse the division, which was existing because of a different mindset: "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." This passage was written to a young church. They were experiencing division because of their immaturity. This division was causing members to attack each other, as well as be a stumbling block to unbelievers. The apostle Paul gives a strong challenge to their community. If they were to survive as a church, build up other Christians in their faith, lead others to Chris, and to be an example to the unsaved, then they would have to drastically improve their unity.

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[45] Hegg, "A Community or a Congregation."

Paul first starts with his authority for the instruction: "In the name of Jesus." The argument begins first with the authority of Jesus. The church belongs to Jesus. A source of this division is because believers in Corinth had lost sight of whom they belonged. As a body of believers, they belonged to Christ. Paul repeatedly reminded the church in Corinth to whom they belonged (1 Cor 3:23, 8:6, 15:23). As head of the church, Jesus has the right to have His church conform to His image (Rom 8:29-30). In his proclamation to the disciples in Matthew 29:19-20, Jesus tells them that he has all "authority." The authority Jesus acknowledges is to be used by the apostles as they do ministry. By applying Christ's power in dealing with the future church, the church is under one authority.

The second appeal is that they all say the same thing. When Paul urged them to speak the same thing, he was stressing unity. Moreover, to be in unity, as Throalf Gilbrant writes, "to unity in love, doctrine, and purpose, which is both essential and mandatory. In fact, 'speak the same thing' is a classical expression used of political communities that were free from factions, or of different states that entertained friendly relations with each other."[46] This violation can be observed in the church today.

The third appeal Paul makes is to be united in the same mind and same judgment. κατηρτισμένοι (*katartízō*) is a Greek word used by Paul. Metaphorically speaking, *katartízō* means to mend or repair. Gerhard Delling writes about *katartízō* in relation to community, that it means to establish, to confirm, especially in terms of Christian character worked out in the sense of unity of the members of the community (1 Cor. 1:10)."[47]

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[46] Throalf Gilbrant, "1 Corinthians 1:10," in *Complete Biblical Library Commentary: Romans-Corinthians*, ed. Stanley M. Horton, Ralph W. Harris, and Thoralf Gilbrant (Springfield, IL: World Library Press, 1998), chap. 1, WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[47] Gerhard Delling, quoted in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. "join–*katartízō*," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

Conclusion

The early church worked hard to be a community. They followed the teachings of the apostles, fellowshipped and prayed together regularly, and looked out for the needs of each other. Grudem writes, "When the Holy Spirit is working strongly in a church to manifest God's presence, one evidence will be a beautiful harmony in the church community and overflowing love for one another."[48] Tom Schreiner states, "Luke summaries present an ideal for the Christian community which it must always strive for, constantly return to, and discover anew, if it is to have the unity of the spirit and purpose essential for an effective witness."[49]

What made the early church effective in proclaiming Jesus was not just their theology but also *how* they practiced their faith. Luke records in Acts 2:47 that the church had favor with all the people. Not all who observed the church agreed with the message of Christ; nevertheless, there was respect for their message. The resulting act of God was adding to the church. There is no denying that God moves when His people are unified, especially when unified for God's glory.

A unified and healthy church is shown in Acts 2:42-47. A unified church reflects a community that abides by the Word of God, fellowships, prays, and meets regularly. Since God is unified in all that He does, so too must His bride be unified. Seeing God's love demonstrated in and by believers will draw others to Christ. The church of Jesus cannot lose sight of being unified.

R. Kent Hughes recalls, "Once in introducing Richard Wurmbrand, I described my church as a Bible-believing church. He stopped me, paused, and said slowly, 'Are you a Bible-living church?' Good question!"[50] Ultimately, the goal is for Ezekiel Baptist to become a more biblical community. Ezekiel is doing good things for the Lord, and

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[48] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 47.

[49] Bock, *Acts*, "C. Summary: Community Life."

[50] R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996), 46-47.

they demonstrate love for one another. Nevertheless, significant challenges face Ezekiel Baptist as it moves to become community. Following the example given by the church found in Acts 2:42-47 will enable Ezekiel to be the type of church Christ originally intended.

CHAPTER 3

CHANGING THE CULTURE

"Change is difficult not changing is fatal."
—Glenn Llopis[1]

To ensure the success of EBC's future, EBC must know when to make changes for the better. Changing an organization's culture is necessary when that culture is contrary to the mission, vision, or survival of the organization. To have a fruitful cultural change, there must be a collaboration between the leader and the followers. Scott Ball believes, "Cultural change requires that every person on the team believes in a better, brighter, more successful future."[2] Cultural change can only occur when both the leader and follower are committed to the same vision. Vision starts with the leader and must be clearly and concisely conveyed by the leader to the followers. Armela Barraco suggests, "Change is easier when management has a clear vision, a focus on customers and continuous improvement, strong measurement, cross-functional orientation, and high employee morale."[3] In the church context, the above statement could be revised to "Change is more natural when church leadership has a clear vision, a focus on Christ's mission and continuous improvement, robust measurement, cross-functional orientation, and high congregation morale."

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[1] Glenn Llopis, "Every Leader Must Be a Change Agent or Face Extinction," *Forbes*, March 24, 2014, https://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2014/03/24/every-leader-must-be-a-change-agent-or-face-extinction/#382bea7d4e0f.

[2] Scott Ball, "3 Roadblocks to Changing Your Church Culture," April 16, 2013, https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/166411-scott-ball-roadblocks-changing-your-church-culture.html.

[3] Armela Barraco, "Changing the Culture of an Organization Is Necessary," June 2016, https://www.coursehero.com/file/ph44qosos/Changing-the-culture-of-an-organization-is-necessary-if-quality-and-performance/.

Changing culture is a daunting task. There are many variables to be considered and pitfalls to avoid. Leading a church from being a congregation to becoming a community requires joint participation from leaders and followers. This chapter will explore what role leaders and followers play in a successful cultural change and introduce a procedure that will allow the fruitful change. When the leader is mentioned in this chapter, it refers to *church leaders*, unless specifically mentioned otherwise.

The Leader

> "The engine that drives change-leadership-and in showing how a purely managerial mindset inevitably fails regardless of the quality of people involved."
> —John Kotter, *Leading Change*[4]

The greatest challenge for any leader is changing the culture when it is ineffective or counter-productive to the church's mission, goals, or the survival of a church. However, the leader must first evaluate himself/herself before trying to lead change. Aubrey Malphurs concludes, "To some degree every pastor is a culture carrier and must exegete his culture to understand it."[5] Every leader brings their life experiences to church leadership. Those experiences shape the philosophy that guides the leader. By not exegeting his culture, the leader may negatively impact the church.

In understanding the leader's culture, Malphurs offers a four-step process to help exegete the leader's culture. Step 1: Discover the source of the leader's culture. Step 1 looks at the leader's background to what things impacted the leader before coming into leadership.[6] Step 2 requires the leader to observe the leader's culture. In this step, the leader asks himself/herself how their culture will impact the church they will lead.[7] Step 3 is to interpret the leader's culture. In step 3, the leader unearths the leader's values and

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[4] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), xii.

[5] Aubrey Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 98.

[6] Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 98.

[7] Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 100.

beliefs.[8] Step 4 is to make application to the leader's culture. In step 4, the leader asks himself/herself how to apply their culture into the church's culture and how God wired the leader to lead.[9]

Taking the time to correctly understand the leader's culture and God's design of the leader significantly improves the leader's ability to change a culture. Change is complicated when either the leader is oblivious to the problem, is a weak leader, or those under the leader enjoy the status quo. To bring about change, the leader must understand it will take an enormous amount of patience, planning, and cooperation from the group. Kotter has observed that it does not matter how great the skill set of the group is, poor leadership will kill any attempts to change the culture.[10] The weak character of a leader is also a killer to cultural change.

The first step in understanding changing a culture is that the leader must recognize that he/she *is* the change agent God is going to use. Everything begins and ends with leaders. Henry Cloud writes, "Leaders define the direction and are responsible for making it happen. And they are responsible for the accountability systems that ensure that it does happen. It always comes back to leadership and the boundaries they allow to exist on their property."[11] Continuing, Cloud makes it clear that the leader is "ridiculously in charge."[12] Cloud recounts a consultation he had with a CEO. When he asked the CEO about changing the culture in his organization, the CEO replied, "You know, when you think about it . . . I *am* ridiculously in charge." Cloud goes on to recall,

At that point, I knew he got it. He realized that he would have exactly the culture that he creates and would not have the one he did not allow to exist. Whatever

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[8] Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 101.

[9] Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead*, 103.

[10] Kotter, *Leading Change*.

[11] Henry Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders: Why Some People Get Results and Others Don't* (New York: Harper Business, 2013), 16.

[12] Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders*, 14.

culture he got, he was either building it or allowing it. He was "ridiculously in charge," that is, "*totally* in charge," and at that moment, he owned it. . . . As a leader, he was going to get what he built, or what he allowed.[13]

Cloud concludes, "You will get what you *create* and what you *allow*."[14] The leader cannot blame the followers for not achieving the vision if they cannot first see themselves as the change agent. Seeing themselves as a change agent is right; however, the church leader must comprehend where their authority lies.

The Leader's Authority

Another aspect of changing culture in the church is recognizing that God has given His leaders a level of authority. The leader would be wise to remember the words Peter exhorts to the elders: "Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:3). Michael Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones concur when they state, "The power that a leader exercises is not the leader's but Christ's; the truth that the leader is called to proclaim is not the leader's vision but God's revelation and the position to which the leader is called is not sovereignty over the community but stewardship within the community, submitted to the leadership of Christ."[15] The leader has authority from Christ; however, leaders must understand how to use that power. A leader must never forget that the congregation belongs to Christ. Christ died, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, makes intercession for, and is coming back for *His* church.

However, to the follower, the writer of Hebrews instructs believers to "obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" (13:17). Christ expects the congregation to respect the leader He

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[13] Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders*, 14.

[14] Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders*, 19.

[15] Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones, *The God Who Goes Before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 3.

has placed in authority (Eph 4:11). The Christ-following leader undertakes changes that will benefit the congregation as a whole and provide a way for the stability of the church.

The leader's ability to understand and correctly apply his God-given power is crucial to the success of the church. Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck go on to say, "Without God's Word as our authority, there is no mission or mandate for the Church at all."[16] The leader's additional guide in changing church culture is the Word. Scripture comes with authority because it comes directly from God. For the church, there is no other authoritative book than the Bible. The Bible is divinely inspired and is infallible (Ps 12:6, 119:96; Prov 30:5; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21). To use any book outside the Bible invites the leader to err when leading God's people.

Additionally, the leader's vision must be the vision given by Christ. The leader's vision should be the direct result of the influence of the Holy Spirit. The change will become null and void to the cause of Christ if it is not His. Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon Penfold concur, "The Lord must grip our hearts with a vision of what can be, a vision of a preferred future."[17] If a change is to be accomplished, the operation of the Lord must be evident.

The apostle Paul had a missionary travel plan to reach the Gentiles, but the Holy Spirit intervened and changed the plan (Acts 16:6-10). Paul had honorable intentions to reach the lost, but the Holy Spirit wanted the gospel preached in another place first. Like Paul, being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit's direction is vital to fruitful church culture change. Because God is holy, He requires the same from His leaders (1 Pet 1:15-16). Therefore, the change agent for the church must have a godly character.

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[16] Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 105.

[17] Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 42-43.

The Leader's Character

Changing church culture can be affected by the leader's character or lack thereof. God *demands* character over skill. The apostle Paul, when instructing Timothy and Titus how to select elders and deacons, list significantly more character traits than skill (1 Tim 3:2-7; Titus 1:5-9). In only two places does Paul talk about skill.

The writer of Hebrews made a powerful statement to leaders when he wrote, "Remember your leaders who have spoken God's Word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith" (13:7). The verse is written to the congregation; however, this statement is powerful in that it challenges the leader to be *already* demonstrating character before the people. No leader can be a change agent if he/she does not exemplify character. Nancy Ortberg observes, "Trust is the foundational element of any good leader and it has to be earned."[18] The absence of trust will negatively impact the leader's ability to sell a vision.

In both secular and religious organizations, experts agree that character is required for successful change (Collins, Kotter, Lencioni, Malphurs). Those who are to adopt the change must believe that the leader has both the organization and employee's interest at heart. Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini state, "The key to a leader's ability to influence people is his or her credibility. Leaders can't lead without it."[19] The foundation of leadership is the character of the leader. Without character, the leader loses the respect of the followers. Kouzes and Posner state, "Credibility is the foundation of leadership. If people don't believe in the messenger, they won't believe in the message."[20]

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[18] Nancy Ortberg, "Reflections on Enable Others to Act," in *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge*, ed. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 89.

[19] Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 21.

[20] James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, "Leadership Is a Relationship," in Kouzes and Posner, *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge,* 120.

The people following have to be confident that the leader has strong character. The character of the leader holds the group together when challenges arise. When the followers see strength, devotion to mission, loyalty, and honesty in the leader, they become willing to follow. The ways a leader gains credibility, according to Malphurs and Mancini, is through "the leader's character, the leader's competence, and clarity of the leader's direction contribute to his or her credibility."[21] People want to follow someone who demonstrates character and competence. Followers can detect phoniness in a leader. Once followers no longer observe character in the leader, it will be almost impossible for the leader to regain trust again, even when the leader has received forgiveness.

Some pastors may not like the culture where they lead but do little or nothing to change it. Thom Rainer notes in his book *Breakout Churches* that some leaders do not want to change the culture of the church they pastor because of fear or laziness. The change leader recognizes his power comes from Christ; therefore, there is no reason to fear the congregation.

Michael Fullan states, "Effective change leaders-or any people who are successful in any walk of life—don't start with imagining the future. They walk into the future through examining their own and others' best practices, looking for insights they had hitherto not noticed."[22] In examining their own and others' best practices, leaders have to recognize how he/she can cause stress in the congregation.

The Leader Causing Stress in the Congregation

Some leaders unknowingly cause stress within the congregation when introducing change. What is in the leader's mind is not necessarily apparent in the congregation's minds. Pat MacMillan observes, "Too many team leaders are complacent about a foggy, uninspiring, ill-defined purpose. They wrongly assume that because the

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[21] Malphurs and Mancini, *Building Leaders*, 21.

[22] Michael Fullan, *Change Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 11.

purpose is clear and import to them, it must appear that way to their team members as well."[23] The trap with the previous assumption is with leaders because they have spent an inordinate amount of time studying the change they expect the congregation to get it in one sitting or simply trust the leader.

Gary Bredfeldt states, "I have observed a disturbing fact. While many pastoral leaders are able to skillfully exegete the literary, historical, and cultural context of a Scripture passage, they are equally unskilled in their ability to critically analyze the context of their church ministry environment."[24] The unskilled ability of the leader causes stress in the congregation. The congregation's stress, when acted out publicly, may cause leaders to assume they are opposed to the change. However, this may not be the case.

I felt led by God to lead a change in the church leadership model from the traditional Baptist leader model of a pastor, deacons, and trustee, to an elder-led congregation one. The reason for this change was because, after reviewing the then current by-laws, our attorney instructed us to make the change. I experienced great push back from the deacons and trustees when they incorrectly perceived I was making a power play. Initially, I sensed the deacons and trustees did not want the change because it meant less power to them, but more to the me. Not understanding that the I was giving up authority, some of the deacons and trustees accused the me of creating a board for more power. This criticism came from some of my most ardent supporters. As a result, some of the deacons and trustees shared with the congregation their displeasure. I became enraged with what I perceived as disloyalty from the deacons and trustees after serving them faithfully and with integrity for over twenty-three years.

It was not until a member made an appointment with me and gave me

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[23] Pat MacMillan, *The Performance Factor: Unlocking the Secrets of Teamwork* (Nashville: B & H, 2001), 41-42.

[24] Gary Bredfeldt, *Great Leader Great Teacher: Recovering the Biblical Vision for Leadership* (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 151.

constructive criticism about the change being clear in my mind. The member explained that I did not clearly explain the reason for the change, nor did I give the congregation enough time to digest the proposed changes to the by-laws. For the first time, I realized where I was wrong and how I had created stress in the congregation from my weak planning. The reaction from the congregants was not a rejection of the plan, nor was it a rejection of my leadership, but the congregation was merely acting out of stress. I, in turn, repented and asked for forgiveness. My repentance and asking for forgiveness changed the attitudes of most of the deacons, trustees, and the congregants. I purposed to be more patient and shared the plan more clearly. The resulting action was that the deacons, trustees, and the rest of the congregation overwhelmingly approved the new by-laws. Leaders must be cognizant of how their leading may cause stress in the congregation.

Leaders set the tone for change and the acceptance of it. Understanding their role in change is crucial for its success. The leader cannot forget that his authority comes from Christ, who is the head of the church and is accountable to Him. Inadequately executed plans by the leader will cause stress within the congregation. Only through proper planning that is clear, concise, and compelling can the leader limit stress during the change process. In the church context, all leaders are accountable to the Lord.

Accountability to the Lord

The Lord was extremely critical of the leaders of the Jews. Because leaders were to represent God, Jesus held them to a higher standard. In the Old Testament, the Lord rebuked and even killed those who went against His commands. Jesus was hardest on the priests Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees (Matt 23:13-36). James warns against having many teachers in the church (Jas 3:1). In Revelation 2–3, the Lord is holding the "angel" or pastors accountable for how they lead His flock. However, through his leaders Jesus builds His church (Eph 2:20, 4:10-12; Heb 13:7, 17). It is valid in all organizations that there be leaders; however, no leader is successful without good followers.

The Follower
"The real problem is getting the people to do what it takes to make the plan work.
That is where you win or lose. It's always about the people."
—Henry Cloud[25]

"He who cannot be a good follower cannot be a leader."
—Aristotle

An article in *Psychology Today* states, "The traditional notion that leaders are active and followers are passive is mistaken and contributes to misconceptions about the organizational functions of superiors and subordinates. Behaviorists now recognize that active followers influence leaders at every level of the hierarchy, and that leadership itself is a process, not a person."[26] No matter how great a leader is, he/she can never accomplish purpose without followers. This section will discuss how followers impact the leader and the task they wish to accomplish.

Research has increased on the impact followers have on leaders. The initial conclusion to this research is that followers can no longer be "discounted." Northouse argues, "Without an understanding of the process of following, our understanding of leadership is incomplete."[27] Researchers have discovered that followers play a more critical role in leadership and either the success or failure of a task. Robert Kelly comments on followership: "Very little research or theorizing considered followers, and if it did, its purpose was to better understand leadership."[28] When research on leadership was developing researchers assumed that the follower was dependent on the leader for knowledge, expertise, and skills; however, most would agree that no one person has all the knowledge, expertise, and skills required in solving or building an organization. After twenty-five years of research, Kelly observes,

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[25] Cloud, *Boundaries for Leaders*, 1.

[26] PT Staff, "In Praise of Followers," *Psychology Today*, September 1, 1992, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/199209/in-praise-followers.

[27] Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership* (Washington DC: Sage, 2019), 293.

[28] Robert E. Kelly, "Rethinking Followership," in *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations*, ed. Ronald E. Riggio, Ira Chaleff, and Jean Lipman-Blumen (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 5.

At the time, leadership was the primary focus for just about all scholars in the field. Very little research or theorizing considered followers, if it did, its purpose was to better understand leadership. . . . Most people held a very negative view of followership and discounted anything positive that could come from the role. No one talked about followership; it was never part of the conversation, unless it was tagged on as an afterthought.[29]

Even the church needs to understand better why congregants respond the way they do. For too long, many pastors, bishops, and elders have led with a mentality of "do what I say." These church leaders correctly quote Hebrews 13:7 and 14, but apply it in an unbalanced way. Sadly, some church leaders become defensive and attack dissenters when they perceive that their authority is being challenged. Sometimes the dissenter is not attacking the leader's position but rather is offering an opinion or desiring clarification. Wilder and Jones believe, "Christ following leaders must never pretend that they possess sovereignty above or separation from the people they serve."[30] Church leaders can reduce resistance to change through mutual respect of the congregants' concerns and ideas.

Modern era followership research credits Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933) with laying the groundwork. However, initially, Follett's theory was rejected and under-appreciated.[31] Follet believed the follower's voice needed to be heard and incorporated in decision making. Peter Northouse acknowledges in his book *Leadership* that in comparison to research on the leader, followership is lacking. Kelly comments on followership: "Very little research or theorizing considered followers, and if it did, its purpose was to better understand leadership."[32] The fault with earlier leadership research was the lack of consideration for the impact of followers on leaders.

Today's research on followership has increased dramatically through multiple theories from research, books, and seminars. Kelly comments, "The landscape for

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[29] Kelly, "Rethinking Followership," 5.

[30] Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes Before You*, 21.

[31] Wikipedia, "Followership," accessed May 20, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Followership.

[32] Kelly, "Rethinking Followership," 5.

followership has changed considerably in the last twenty-five years."[33] Researchers have concluded that much goes into the decision-making process of a follower before he/she will accept the leader's purpose.

Accepted Leadership

It has been said, "If you are leading, and no one is following, you're just taking a walk." Organizations cannot excel and survive without good followers. Northouse defines followership as "a process whereby an individual or individuals accept the influence of others to accomplish a common goal."[34] Followers choose if they are going to support a leader and the goal. Too often, leaders believe that people will automatically follow a good idea. However, followers go through a mental process before giving consent.

People are naturally drawn to a popular, successful, and charismatic leader, but what keeps them is how the leader loves, respects, and empowers them. However, MacMillan concludes, "People buy into the purpose, in the very truest sense, it is theirs."[35] Unless followers believe the purpose is theirs too, they will not support the purpose.

Successful change agents understand that their power is earned from their followers, not demanded. MacMillan suggests, "To be effective, you must be accepted by those you lead, and such acceptance is earned, not demanded. When leadership is accepted, people are more responsive, more involved, and quicker to take initiative."[36] When followers see the leader as a "servant-leader," they are more inclined to give power. A leader does not have authority over the group until the group accepts that

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[33] Kelly, "Rethinking Followership," 6.

[34] Northouse. *Leadership*, 295.

[35] MacMillan, *The Performance Factor*, 97.

[36] MacMillan, *The Performance Factor*, 107.

leadership. A common mistake with some leaders is "the one that has the title has the power." This is a dangerous philosophy for a leader to have. The leader receives power through the acceptance of followers. Peter challenges church leaders to understand their role and authority: "Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:2-3). The church belongs to the Lord and not the church leader. The church leader leads with the understanding that he/she, too, is accountable to Christ.

When followers are confident in the leader's skill, character, ability, and competence, those followers empower the leader. Followers need to believe they are valued for more than their presence at worship service, the workplace, a gathering, or meeting. Followers appreciate it when the leader listens to their input, values their suggestions, and implement those suggestions when appropriate. MacMillan goes on to state, "Leadership acceptance will come easier when the team leader has a mind-set that reflects the value and potential of those he or she leads and sees the role of leadership as serving rather than being served." [37] Jesus modeled this form of leadership while discipling the apostles and instructed the apostles to exemplify this in their future leadership roles (Matt 20:28).

Servant-leader is a term used in both secular and religious circles. This truth is found in Christ's teachings. Followers respond positively to the leader when the leader has a servant's mentality rather than an autocratic one. Successful leaders realize that followers need to know how following the leader's vision will benefit them. Not that followers are always selfish, but followers need personal fulfillment in a purpose. The disciples would not have been willing to leave all and die for Jesus unless Jesus could convince them His work benefited them. Astute leaders make sure followers believe they will benefit by following the leader. Kouzes and Posner suggest, "When you're leading a

[37] MacMillan, *The Performance Factor*, 108.

group or an organization, you have to move from "what *I* believe" to "what *we* believe."[38]

Therefore, to change the culture, the change agent must be viewed as a servant-leader, and the purpose must be higher than fulfilling the leader's personal agenda.

Jesus instilled in his disciples that they would be more valuable to His kingdom not by being domineering but by having a servant's spirit. Mark 10:42-45 says,

> Jesus called them over and said to them, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve."

Having a servant's spirit goes a long way in the follower buying into the vision.

Accepted Vision

Leaders create good followers when vision is clear, concise, and compelling. A vision is evident when followers can see and explain what the vision is in their own words. A vision must be concise since too much wording will confuse or frustrate the follower, thus defeating the vision. Last, a vision is to be compelling to the follower for participation. Kouzes and Posner write, "Having *your* vision of the future isn't enough, however, others must be able to see themselves in that future."[39] Effective change leaders understand that their followers must be able to see themselves in that future and work diligently to accomplish it.

Kotter comments, "Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles."[40] Aligning and inspiring followers is a challenge all leaders must accomplish for change to take place. If alignment is off just a bit initially, the task may miss its goal completely.

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[38] James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, "The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership," in Kouzes and Posner, *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge*, 11.

[39] Kouzes and Posner, "The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership,"18, emphasis original.

[40] Kotter, *Leading Change*, 28.

Getting followers to see the vision is good, but getting them to be passionate about the vision is another challenge. Michael Fullan concludes, "This is the essence of *the change leader*: the capacity to generate energy and passion in others through action."[41] Generating energy and passion was accomplished when Jesus sent out the seventy-two for ministry. When the seventy-two returned with joy, they exclaimed to Jesus, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17). Jesus had to temper their joy when He said, "However, don't rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). The seventy-two did not develop energy and passion until they experienced success in ministry. The vision of Jesus became clearer through the experience of ministry. When the disciples experienced success and saw their roles, they became enthused. The same applies when developing energy and passion with followers. When the followers *experience* the benefit of the change, they will become energized and passionate. Fullan goes on to conclude, "The establishment of new practices and experiences galvanizes passion."[42] The change leader must involve followers in the change process to create passion in them. The reverse is true for how followers can have a positive effect on the leader.

Followers cannot not only be bought into the vision but should also contribute to the success of that vision. Fullan concludes, "Vision is a clear, exciting picture of God's future for your ministry as you believe it can and must be."[43] The leader has to be convinced in his own heart that the vision announced is the right one for all. Malphurs and Penfold conclude, "You not only believe that the vision can be, you believe that it must be."[44] The previous statement is not applicable for selfish or immoral reasons. Successful evil leaders can convince gullible and naïve followers with their charisma.

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[41] Fullan, *Change Leader,* 23, emphasis original.

[42] Fullan, *Change Leader,* 23.

[43] Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:Vision*, 154.

[44] Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:Vision*, 155.

With twenty-seven years of pastoral experience, I that learned the congregation must be informed regularly, especially when significant changes are about to take place. The pastor must be intentional and systematic in how the change is being communicated and applied. Too little information will cause the congregation to overreact negatively. The adverse reactions may include outright rejection of the idea, giving the opposers ammunition against the leader, or cause people to be confused. Patrick Lencioni writes, "When it comes to reinforcing clarity, there is no such thing as too much communication."[45] Vision must be communicated numerous times in multiple ways. Unfortunately, some leaders, especially pastors and other church leaders, are ignorant of the consequences of under communicating. Lencioni explains,

> The problem is that leaders confuse the mere transfer of information to an audience with the audience's ability to understand, internalize, and embrace the message that is being communicated. The only way for people to embrace a message is to hear it over a period of time, in a variety of different situations, and preferably from different people.[46]

People need to hear information repeatedly in various forms. Successful businesses advertise on multiple platforms, multiple times, and in multiple ways to communicate their product or service. So too must the church leader communicate a vision. To get understanding and buy-in to a vision, the leader has to over-communicate. However, having poor ethics can derail any vision.

The Ethics of Followership

Lencioni writes,

> Followership is about saying and doing the right things. Followership is acting properly and well in a given situation. It is doing and saying what the situation dictates. This is what the ancients called eloquence and decorum, saying and doing

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[45] Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 15.

[46] Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 142.

the right things. What we might call walking the talk. As such followership is an ethical and moral discipline and must be taught and learned as such.[47]

When leaders have ethical standards, faithful followers must hold themselves to that standard. Groups cannot accomplish goals when the leader is required to meet standards while the followers are not. Northouse explains, "Followership is not amoral; that is, it is not a process that is morally neutral. Followership carries with it a responsibility to consider the morality of one's actions and the rightness or wrongness of the outcomes of what one does as a follower."[48] Not only does the character of the leader impact the culture, but also the attitude and behavior of followers. Both the attitudes and behaviors of the leader and follower must be in sync. If the leader and follower's attitudes and behaviors are out of sync, even just a little bit, then the entire group is off target.

Ethics makes all the difference in accomplishing a goal. Both the leader and follower must have the same ethics. If either is different, then the obtaining of any goal is made that much more difficult. James Maroosis concludes,

> Doing the right thing (*prudence)* for the right reasons (*justice*) often requires *courage* and always requires not acting out *temperance,* (*soundness of mind*). These virtues are not a product of wishful thinking. On the contrary, they have been studied and applied throughout the ages because, and only because, of their "rightness," their efficacy and their track record as best practices. . . . The difference between followers and leaders is that followers need leaders to help them follow what the leaders themselves are following.[49]

By leading with ethics, the leader sets the tone for the follower. However, the follower has the responsibility not to follow blindly, but to give constructive criticism, keeping the leader on purpose and keeping themselves accountable. The leader cannot lead with deception and expect followers to respect him, nor can the leader have confidence in the followers if they have no intention of completing the project with integrity. Through being ethical, the leader earns the confidence of the follower to follow him. Maroosis

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[47] James Maroosis, "Leadership: A Partnership in Reciprocal Following," in Riggio, Chaleff, and Lipman-Blumen, *The Art of Followership*, 21.

[48] Northouse, *Leadership*, 295.

[49] Maroosis, "Leadership," 22-23.

believes, "Leadership and followership are about doing the right things. They are about saying the right words and hearing them in the right ways."[50] What made Jesus' style of leading unmistakable was His consistency in teaching and living. In observing Jesus' life, the disciples formulated their eventual leadership of the church.

Kelly states, "The ability to make ethical and legal judgments, to take proactive steps to promote ethical and legal activities, and then to stand up against unethical and illegal decisions and actions is a crucial aspect of followership."[51] Good followers make a conscious decision to remain ethical when a leader does not. The same is true about good leaders. Ethical leaders will never encourage their followers to be unethical either by action or demands.

Leadership/Followership Culture

Just like the leader has his own culture, followers have their own culture as well. The challenge for the leader is that he not only has to understand his own culture, but he must consider the cultures of *all* the followers within the group. Figure 1 demonstrates the interaction between the leader and followers. Each has its own culture and idiosyncrasies in the organization. Where the two circles meet is how each group influences the other positively or negatively.
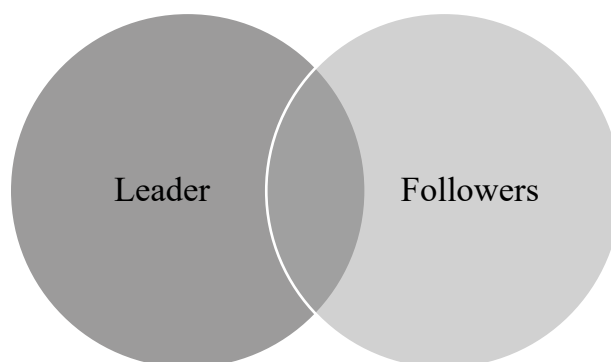
Figure 1. Interaction and influence between leaders and followers

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[50] Maroosis, "Leadership," 21.

[51] Kelly, "Rethinking Followership," 15.

Earlier studies on leadership focused on the impact of leader, but not on followership. Kelly writes, "Scholars emphasized the *interactions* between leaders and followers."[52] However, a conference in February 2006 titled *Rethinking Followership*, dramatically changed that.

Both the leader and follower have their roles; however, to accomplish a task, both need to be in harmony. Figure 2 shows that good leaders must know when it is time to be a good follower. Figure 2 also demonstrates the cycle of leader/follower. The leader may begin as the leader, but during the process the leader will become a follower then back to the leader.[53]
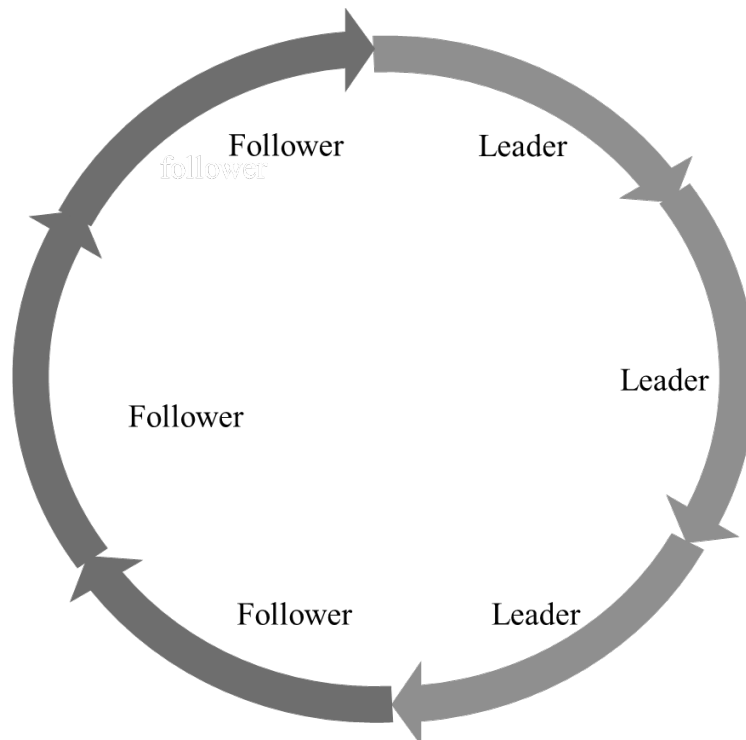
Figure 2. Cycle of leadership/followership

Follower researchers have devised methods of followership. There are at least five models of followership; however, only two are explored for this project.

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[52] Kelly, "Rethinking Followership," 2

[53] Figure 2 adapted from Northouse, *Leadership*, 299.

Kelly identifies five basic styles of followership:

1. The sheep. They are passive and expect the leader to do all the thinking for them.

2. The yes-people. They are positive and always on the leader side but still look to the leader, the thinking, the direction, and the vision.

3. The alienated. They think for themselves but have a lot of negative energy. Every time the leader or organizations wants to go forward, they fight it

4. The pragmatics. They are fence-sitters. Their mindset is "been there before." They wait to see what happens first, then respond. They are the preservers of the status quo.

5. The star-followers. They think for themselves, are very active, and have high positive energy. They will not accept the leader's decision until they have completed their independent assessment. If they agree, the leader gets their full support. However, if they disagree, they will challenge the leader, offer constructive alternatives that will help the organization get to where they want to go.[54]

Northouse summarizes Kelly's encouragement to leaders to keep these five types of followers in mind while leading change.[55] Each type of follower requires acceptance of that style and understanding how to lead them. Failing to take the time to understand the types of followers a leader has will only add to his/her frustration.

Jesus calls his followers sheep. Using Kelly's definition and applying it to the church, the Lord wants followers to be like sheep and yes-people. Jesus wants followers who will obey all His commands. The pragmatic will delay the movement of the church going forward. Star-followers are good, but they may rely on their understanding; thus, they have the potential to get the group out of alignment. However, for a pastor, having star-followers are a benefit to leading change. Star-followers are a benefit since they may have an alternative way, which is better. Good leaders need helpful followers.

As informative as Kelly's theory is, Ira Chaleff's model is closest to a biblical model of church. Chaleff's original model of "Courageous Followership" proposed four dimensions in which courageous followers operate within a group and a fifth dimension

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[54] Robert Kelly, in Northouse, *Leadership*, 297.

[55] Northouse, *Leadership*, 297

in which the follower operates either within or outside the group depending on the response of the leadership. Interestingly, Chaleff sees the role of followers as

1. The follower assumes responsibility. The follower takes the initiate in being responsible for themselves and the organization. Taking responsibility and being accountable to each other and the Lord is expected of the follower of Christ. Where this model differs from the church is that followers are not dependent on leaders for growth and security. However, the church expects and relies on the Lord for growth and security (John 15:5-6).

2. Followers are servants. Followers are servants to the organization and the leader. Followers lookout for the good of the organization. Followers stand up for the leader. Followers are not afraid to work hard. Followers are as passionate as the leader (Matt 23:11; Luke 9:23, 14:27; 2 Cor 4:8-12; 2 Tim 3:12).

3. Followers challenge what they deem unfair. Followers speak up when things are not as they perceive; however, they remain loyal to the leader and the organization. Because God is gracious and patient, He allows His followers to speak their minds without judging them (Exod 33:12-16; 2 Cor 12:7-8). There are times when a leader(s) makes a decision that is detrimental to the church. It is incumbent on other leaders or even the congregation to speak up when a decision is improper (Gal 2:11-14).

4. Followers participate in transformation. The whole objective with Christ redeeming the fallen is so that they could be transformed. Transformed into a new way of living. Transformed into the glory of God. Transformed into being unified with other believers (Matt 28:19-20; Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 5:17).

5. Followers take moral actions. Followers take a stand against all immorality. They will be obedient to Christ when a leader goes against the word (John 10:27; Eph 5:11; 1 Tim 5:19-20).[56]

Chaleff theorizes, "Rather than *serving leaders,* followers serve a *common purpose* al*ong with leaders*."[57] Only Jesus is perfect; thus, whatever He commands is perfect and can be carried out because of His ability to empower. Jesus also demanded that his disciples follow Him. However, the church leader being human has limitations. Therefore, the wise church leader welcomes input from the followers.

Chaleff makes points about followers that appear to conflict with Christianity. However, in general, followers of Christ are expected to be courageous in how they follow Him. Christ is the supreme ruler of the church, but situations will arise when the follower

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[56] Northouse, *Leadership*, 299.

[57] Ira Chaleff, quoted in Northouse, *Leadership*, 299, emphasis original.

may need to take action. It is not that Christ has done anything unethical or immoral, but human leaders have flaws. Followers should speak up in matters of immorality or poor decision rather than letting the organization flounder. Faithful followers take ownership, have accountability, are ethical, and support their leader.

Follow Me

It is not that there cannot be a leader in the traditional sense; however, no one person has all the skills, knowledge, expertise, and experience for every situation. Though in the church context, Jesus is the one that fits the requirements.

When calling his apostle and teaching on discipleship, Jesus commanded, "Follow me." *Follow* is translated from two different Greek words in the Gospels. The first is δεῦτε, which means come. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus tells Peter to "follow" or come after me, and I will make you fishers of men. David Abernathy informs the reader, "This adverb indicates an extension toward a goal at or near the speaker and implies movement."[58] As it was for Jesus to change the spiritual culture in Jerusalem, so too changing culture in a church requires having goals that followers understand and can implement. δεῦτε is the least commonly used. The second word, ἀκολουθέω, is more widely used in the Gospels.

ἀκολουθέω is more intimate than δεῦτε. Spiros Zodhiates comments, ἀκολουθέω involves "the individual calling to follow Jesus involved abiding fellowship with Him, not only for the sake of learning as a scholar from his teacher."[59] Because the church is a community, a level of intimacy between the leader and follower is vital to changing a culture. Like the disciples, followers need to come with the leader as well as having a connection. In Jesus' model, it was evident that the disciples were connected

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[58] David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of Matthew 1-16* (Dallas: SIL International, 2013), "Matthew 4," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[59] Spiros Zodhiates, *New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), "Matthew 4:19," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

with Jesus. The connection came out of a relationship. A relationship involves risks, but both the leader and the follower have to be willing to take risks. When properly connected, the reward is greater than the risk.

Interestingly, in the church context, two types of followers are needed. In one instance, the followers implicitly obey what the leader instructs. In another instance, there is a collaboration between the leader and the follower. The first example represents Jesus and the church. Since Christ is the Head of the church and supreme Ruler (Eph 5:23b; Col 1:18), the church is commanded to obey Him. In the second example, the pastor, elder, or bishop leads, but with help from followers. It is acknowledged that different denominations and independent churches have their unique approaches to administration.

Figure 3 illustrates Jesus as the head, those Jesus has placed in authority, and the congregation. Most Christian denominations have some form of hierarchy in their church. The majority of denominations have Jesus as the head. The difference is in how the congregation is organized. The Roman Catholic administration is steeped in a hierarchy, whereas some churches only have the pastor as the authority after Jesus. With some denominations there are bishops and elders. For denominations that have elders. some are elder-ruled while others are elder-led.[60]
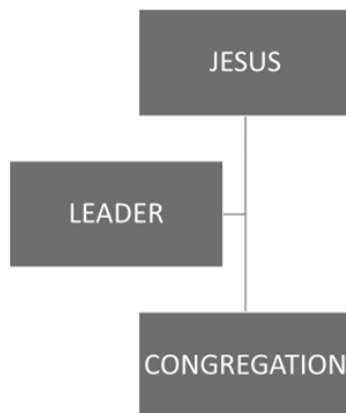
Figure 3. Organizational chart of the church

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[60] This research does not review which administration is nearest to what Jesus wanted.

Leading a church requires a balancing act of being an obedient follower of Christ and a servant-leader. Peter reminds the pastor of whom the church belongs to and to check their motivation for serving: ⸢Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:2-3). Paul, understanding the importance of being an example to the flock, instructs Timothy to follow the pattern given to him and instill it in those he is leading (1 Tim 4:6).

The traditional leader-follower model has its beginnings in a different world under specific circumstances. In the hierarchical paradigm, the leader makes the decisions, but the follower obeys with little contribution to the decision. The church uses both paradigms. The hierarchical paradigm is Christ and the church. However, when it comes to servanthood within the church, the church leader is both a leader and a follower. Jesus rejected the hierarchical model for the disciples when leading:

> Jesus called them over and said to them, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. (Mark 10:42-45a)

Conclusion

Leaders need to understand their roles and then assist followers in accepting their role in performing a task together. Followers impact their leaders like leaders affect their followers. Mutual acceptance and respect between leaders and followers are necessary to reach organizational goals.

Leaders must understand the dynamics of followership. Realizing the fickleness of people, leaders need to recognize followers' desires. Followers are motivated to work based on their desires. The leader has to master the art of helping the follower see and understand why the action requested is necessary and beneficial. Additionally, to have a working relationship, the leader ensures, through understanding their followers, that there

are mutually agreeable expectations. Mutual acceptance between the leader and the follower aids in completing tasks.

Paul Fieguth states, "An organization with motivated empowered followers whose followership is valued and respected by their leaders would be unstoppable."[61] A critical component to the success of a task is how followers feel valued by their leaders. The apostles were so convinced that Jesus loved them and appreciated them that they left all and risked their lives and reputations (John 13:1).

Jesus designed His church that ministry is a cooperative work between the pastor (elders) and the congregation (Rom 12:3-8; Eph 4:10-12). For the ministry to be successful, both the leaders and the congregation need to appreciate the design Christ gave. Finally, both leaders and followers are to be ethical. There cannot be two standards of ethics and morals among leaders and followers. The standard Jesus gave for His followers is the standard of how He lived (Matt 5:48). Therefore, to change the culture, the leader uses his skill, competencies, knowledge. Additionally, both the leader and followers must work together with integrity.

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[61] Paul Fieguth, "Global Fellowship Conference," July 26-28 2019, University of Waterloo, Canada, accessed February 15, 2020, https://followershipconference.com/.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the project implementation and provides a detailed account of surveys and meetings. The purpose of this project was to begin to move Ezekiel Baptist Church from being a congregation to become a community. The first goal was to assess the stated and actual values of Ezekiel Baptist Church as they pertained to community. This goal was considered successfully met when the ten participants completed survey 1 (pre-survey). The second goal was to increase the church's understanding of what community means in a biblical context. This goal was accomplished by gathering a group of ten key representative leaders to do the four-week study that accompanied the sermon series. Members who participated in this training completed a second survey after the last session. A comparison of the results from the pre- and post-training surveys by using a *t*-test helped to determine if the participants' views on community changed significantly. The third goal was to work with a group of key leaders to approve a new church vision statement that reflected an understanding of a biblical community. This goal was considered successful when the ten participants produced a new vision statement for the church. The implementation of this project commenced on June 28, 2020, and continued through August 13, 2020.

The Team

This research established previously that a change in any organization takes years. However, inside change precedes outside change. The Bible instructs believers in Romans 12:2 to be transformed by renewing their minds. Philippians 4:8-9 tells believers what things to consider. The word "consider" in Philippians 4: 8 is λογίζομαι. λογίζομαι "means to put together with one's mind, to count, to occupy oneself with reckonings or

calculations."[1] Going from a congregation to a community will require Ezekiel Baptist Church to "consider" if being a community has value to them. If Ezekiel values being a community over being a congregation, then some beliefs will have to change as well; thus, the need for this project.

Goal 1 involved assessing the beliefs of ten selected Ezekiel Baptist Church members to determine the culture of Ezekiel. The mission statement of Ezekiel[2] served as a comparative artifact to assess the difference between the stated and actual values of the church regarding community. The mission statement served as a tool for understanding EBC's current culture in survey 1.

Significant cultural change requires the right team to facilitate it. John Kotter observes, "The first step in putting together the kind of team that can direct a change effort is to find the right membership."[3] Putting the right team together was crucial for the success of this project. The participants could not all be the same.

Because the research required diversity, I selected participants based on sex, age, and church participation. Participants consisted of an elder, deacon, deaconess, trustee, a ministry leader, and five lay members. Five men and five women participated in this research. The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 71. The participants received survey 1 by email before the first session. All the participants completed survey 1.

The ten participants served as representatives for congregation feedback. A post-survey was given after the last session using 20 of the statements from survey 1 to assess growth in understanding biblical community.

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[1] Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1993), s.v. "consider," WORD*search* CROSS e-book.

[2] The mission statement of Ezekiel Baptist Church: "The mission of the Ezekiel Baptist Church is to glorify God through the reconciliation of the lost and the edification of the believer through worship, fellowship, discipleship, and prayer."

[3] John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 59.

The Sermon Series

The sermon series, "Going from Congregation to Community," began on Sunday, June 28, 2020. The sermon series was entitled, "Going from Congregation to Community." Acts 2:42-47 was selected as the Scripture for the sermon series because it best reflects what a Christian community is. The sermons were live-streamed via Ezekiel's website and Facebook. Participants were asked to view the sermon series and comment on them at the meeting following the sermon. Four Zoom meetings were held once a week over five weeks during June and July. After the completion of the post-survey, a follow-up meeting was held in August. The meetings, initially scheduled for four weeks, were extended one week because of technical difficulties with the streaming during one of the broadcasts.

The first sermon was titled "Being the Church." This first sermon was an introduction to the content that would be discussed in the following weeks. During the first sermon, I explained Tim Hegg's contrast between a congregation and a community (see table 1).[4]

Table 1. Summary of Tim Hegg's contrast between congregation and community

Congregation	Community
Primarily concerned with near and present	While concerned with the present, always has a generational element as its core
Puts the majority of its efforts into cognitive endeavors: Getting people to agree with the truth is thought to assure longevity of the core values.	Also stresses the need to confess the truth (cognition) but believes that the truth cannot endure apart from the life-to-life interactions that span generations

The second sermon in the series explained how the people in Acts 2:42 were devoted to the apostle's teaching. The sermon began with the question, "How will we know when we are living as a community? The answer was, "We will know we are living

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[4] Tim Hegg, "A Community or a Congregation: What Are We Striving For?" January 27, 2016, https://messianicpublications.com/tim-hegg/a-community-or-a-congregation-for-what-are-we-striving/.

as a community when we live by Christ's teachings, we are guided by a generational vision, and we have life-to-life interactions."

The third sermon narrowed the scope of a biblical community. *Community* refers to the people who make up the church membership, not the people who live in the neighborhood. The sermon intentionally narrowed the definition of *community* since many people, when they hear *community*, think of their neighbors at large. The emphasis of the sermon was to help listeners understand that the message was not about a caring ministry but how the members of a church become one.

The final sermon in the series exegeted the phrase "to the breaking of bread and to the prayers" from Acts 2:42. Refusing to eat the Lord's body and drinking His blood (communion) meant a person was not saved. Jesus, when confronted by some of the disciples about eating His body and drinking of His blood, told them they were not a part of Him (John 6:25-59). Because those disciples rejected the idea, the Bible says, "From that moment many of his disciples turned back and no longer accompanied him" (John 6:66). To create closeness through prayer, I challenged the members of EBC to call five people during the week and pray with them. Additionally, a corporate church prayer meeting via Zoom was scheduled for the following Sunday.[5]

The Sessions

This section will summarize the five sessions I had with the ten participants via Zoom. There were four successive sessions and one follow-up session to discuss the results of the post-survey. During the Zoom sessions, the ten participants discussed their reflections on the sermons, their reactions to the surveys and received instructions on producing a vision statement. During sessions 3 and 4, the participants created a vision statement with goals and objectives. Each session was recorded on Zoom with the participants' acknowledgment and permission.

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[5] Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Ezekiel had five corporate prayer meetings weekly and four quarterly church prayer meeting on Sunday

Session 1

In the first session, 9 of the 10 participants attended. The participants were emailed survey 1 and asked to complete and return the survey before the first session. The participants were asked for their observations of survey 1. Some participants expressed that they liked the directness of the survey. One participant expressed that the survey was appreciated because it went deep into who Ezekiel Baptist Church is. The survey caused them to reflect on the seriousness of the entire ministry of Ezekiel and to be their best for Christ.

Additionally, the survey caused participants to reflect on where they fit in Ezekiel. "We cannot be our best if we are not honest in our relationship with Christ," responded one of the participants. Another participant commented that the survey allowed non-leaders in Ezekiel to express their thoughts and feelings with candor. One participant felt the survey was inclusive in that it took a look at the pastor down to the lay member.

The next phase of the meeting moved to reflections on the sermon from the previous Sunday. Participants were glad to see that Ezekiel was moving from a congregation to being a community. Receiving the working definition between a *congregation* and a *community* helped to give them clarity. It was clear that the participants understood the differences between a congregation and a community.

The final part of the session included discussing Ezekiel's vision statement. At the beginning of this section, I shared my concerns about the future of Ezekiel Baptist Church. I shared that Ezekiel needed to develop a template for future generations to guide them. The session ended with a participant cautioning that God's standard must be upheld at all times in Ezekiel.

Evaluation of session 1. The session had a sense of feeling each other out. Because many participants were unfamiliar with each other, there was initially a tentativeness among them. Except for two, most participants were hesitant to give their

opinions. Some participants did not complete the survey before the meeting, and those participants were encouraged to complete the survey as soon as possible. The concern with participants not completing the survey before the meeting was that their answers might be contaminated if they were involved in the discussion first. Overall, after some nervousness ended, the group began to discuss more freely without me asking them to share with the group.

Session 2

Session 2 was held on Tuesday, July 7, 2020, and included a discussion of the sermon from the previous Sunday and a time of evaluating the need for producing a vision statement. All 10 participants attended.

This session began with the group discussing Ezekiel Baptist Church's mission statement. The mission statement of Ezekiel is, "The Ezekiel Baptist Church exists to glorify God through the reconciliation of the lost and the edification of the believer through evangelism, worship, prayer, fellowship, and discipleship." Participants were emailed the mission statement the Sunday before the session so that all would be familiar. Participants discussed how they saw some members practicing the mission statement. Participants saw contradictions with what the mission statement said compared to the actions of some Ezekiel members. Participants expressed reasons for the contradictions, such as a lack of knowledge of the mission statement and that some members do not have the faith nor confidence to evangelize. There was a suggestion given to have personal evangelism training.

Participants started the discussion on the vision statement by saying that the community was the neighborhood of Ezekiel Baptist Church. The working definition of *community* as it pertains to this study was again clarified for the participants. Participants began brainstorming on what should be included in the vision statement.

Evaluation of session 2. The participants began to bond in this session. Participants who were not initially freely dialoguing were contributing without being asked. The participants expressed concern that Ezekiel Baptist Church was not reaching out to the younger people. With that concern expressed, one of the younger participants volunteered to connect Ezekiel's Facebook page with Instagram. The younger participant said his peers go to Instagram first.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of Ezekiel starting life groups to increase life-to-life interactions. The group envisioned life groups growing and stabilizing Ezekiel. Participants were informed that life groups in Ezekiel had already begun in 2019 and expect life groups to launch in 2021.

Lastly, the most significant accomplishment of this session was beginning to develop the vision statement.

Session 3

Session 3 was held on Tuesday, July 14, 2020, at 7 p.m. All 10 participants were in attendance. The participants were asked, "What differences do you see between the church in Acts 2:42 and Ezekiel Baptist Church?" The participants shared that the church in Acts 2:42-47 showed more consistency and was more intentional in how they devoted themselves to the Word, fellowship, prayer, and the breaking of the bread compared to Ezekiel.

The participants noted that Ezekiel must be consistent in being unified. However, there was also the optimism that God would do the same in Ezekiel if Ezekiel were consistent in the Word, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Participants recognized that one of the results of unity was God adding to the church. A concern with the participants was that some Ezekiel members are not as concerned about what glorifies God. Those same members focus on differences, not on things that will unite Ezekiel.

Participants were polled using three questions. (1) Is Ezekiel Baptist Church a congregation or a community? Participants unanimously agreed: a congregation. (2) Is

Ezekiel Baptist Church close to being a community, or does Ezekiel Baptist Church have a long way to go? The majority said a long way to go; however, 1 participant replied that Ezekiel Baptist Church is close. (3) Do they agree or disagree with the following statement: "We will know we are living as a community when we live by Christ's teachings, we are guided by a generational vision, and we have life-to-life interactions." The participants unanimously agreed.

Vision statement. This part of the vision statement session started with two quotes from Aubrey Malphurs: "Vision is a clear, exciting picture of God's future for your ministry as you believe it can and must be,"[6] and "visions are the product of people who dream great dreams for God."[7] Participants were given guidelines for creating a vision statement.[8] I introduced a starting point for the vision statement but then let the participants finish producing the vision statement.[9] Participants were also given the vision statement's supporting Scripture: Romans 15:15-16.

Participants suggested that Ezekiel Baptist Church's vision statement should be written so that if someone is considering joining Ezekiel, after reading the vision, one can say, "Ezekiel is a place where I can serve or not serve." Additionally, participants believed the vision statement should be useful for an existing member to determine if he can continue to serve in Ezekiel. The meeting ended with instructions to come back with a completed vision statement along with goals and objectives.

Evaluation of session 3. Participants continued to grow as a team. The beginning of wordsmithing for the vision statement was an excellent accomplishment

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[6] Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 154.

[7] Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:Vision*, 153.

[8] The guidelines are in appendix 5.

[9] See appendix 6.

even though the participants looked physically tired due to the lateness of the hour. Participants seem to have grasped the difference between congregation and community better than before and want Ezekiel Baptist Church to be a community. In session 1, participants understood the definition, but in this session, they began to apply what they understood. The session ended with the vision statement starting to be created.

Session 4

The fourth session, conducted on July 28, 2020, was two weeks after the previous session because participants could not view the sermon—the sermon was preached twice because of the broadcasting difficulties. The part of the sermon citing Hebrews 10:24-25 was impactful on the participants. Many participants commented on how God wants Ezekiel Baptist Church to come together as a community, and that fellowshipping with other believers is essential to spiritual growth and stability.

Evaluation of session 4. The participants worked well in producing a vision statement. The excitement of EBC becoming a community resonated with them. It was evident in the participants they liked the vision EBC could become.

Session 5

Session 5 was conducted after the post-survey results were reviewed by me on August 13, 2020, to answer any ambiguities or contradictions in the answers the participants gave. Those differences in answers from the pre- and post-surveys are discussed in the survey results section of this chapter. Only four statements needed to be followed-up on.

Evaluation of session 5. The participants looked tired from their day, but they hung in. What appeared as contradictions to me between survey 1 and survey 2 were cleared up during this session.

The Surveys

Participants received two surveys. Surveys 1 and 2 were administered individually from each other. The surveys obtained information about the culture of Ezekiel Baptist Church. Survey 1 contained sixty-one statements, marked on a six-point statement Likert Scale. Survey 1 captured the respondents' thoughts on Acts 2:42-47, leadership, and followership.[10] Survey 2 was the post-survey and captured responses following the study on twenty identical statements from survey 1.[11]

Survey 1

There was only one unanimous answer, and that was on the statement, "We can accomplish goals even if we are unethical." All participants responded, "strongly disagree." However, on the statement, "The congregation must be as ethical and as moral as the leaders," 6 responded "strongly agree," while 2 responded "agree somewhat," and 2 did not respond. In session 5, I asked why the participants had different responses to the congregation must be as ethical and as moral as the leaders. One participant stated, "People hold leaders to a higher standard, but lay . . . because of their lower maturity in Christ; the expectation is less for the lay than leaders."

It was interesting to note that on the statement, "The congregation understands the church's vision," 80 percent responded "agree somewhat" or "agree." The problem with those responses was that Ezekiel Baptist Church has never posted a vision statement. When I asked in session 5 why the respondents felt this way, some admitted that they confused the mission statement with a vision statement. Others stated that their answers were based on Ezekiel's annual theme, and that theme is interpreted as the vision statement. Still, another participant felt that based on things Ezekiel has gone through the past three years—rewriting Ezekiel's by-laws and the just-completed capital campaign— that was the vision. In conjunction with the congregation understanding the church's

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[10] See appendix 1.

[11] See appendix 2.

vision, participants were split on, "Leadership has cast a strong and compelling vision." Nine said, "agree somewhat" or "agree," and 1 responded, "disagree." When I asked in session 5 why the participants were split in their response, a participant responded that her answer was based on the annual church theme. It was interesting that even though Ezekiel did not have an official vision statement, participants saw the annual church theme as Ezekiel's vision. Participants seeing the annual church theme as the vision supports the need for defining and developing a vision statement.

The survey showed that the participants were satisfied with Ezekiel's leadership skills, abilities, competency, and character (see table 2).

Table 2. Survey 1 responses to confidence in leadership's skills, abilities, character, and competency

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
46. Congregation is confident in leadership's skills				3	4	3
47. Congregation is confident in leadership's abilities				2	5	3
48. Congregation is confident in leadership's character				2	3	5
49. Congregation is confident in leadership's competency				3	2	5

Participants recognized that individual and corporate prayer is a core value in Ezekiel but acknowledge that corporate attendance is low. Table 3 shows the contrast between prayer being a core value and the attendance at corporate prayer meetings.

Table 3. Survey 1 responses for prayer as a core value
and attendance at prayer meetings

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
17. Prayer is a core value of our church					4	6
26. We have strong attendance at prayer meetings		4	3	3		

When asked in session 5 why attendance is low in corporate prayer meetings, respondents thought that the time when corporate prayer is held presents challenges to many Ezekiel members. Additionally, families that have young children face challenges with getting their children ready. Three criticisms were voiced: (1) corporate prayer is not a priority for some members; (2) some people do not understand the necessity of corporate prayer; and (3) the importance of corporate prayer is not demonstrated by leadership because of their absence from corporate prayer meetings.

Participants appreciated having prayer via Zoom because it eliminated traveling to and from the church. A couple of suggestions were made for corporate prayer: (1) have quarterly church prayer meeting after morning service; (2) if having a corporate prayer meeting after morning service, make it a fellowship by having food; and (3) survey the congregation on a better time to have a corporate prayer meeting.

Survey 2

Survey 2 was conducted after the final sermon and the fourth Zoom session. Survey 2 contained 20 statements from pre-survey 1. Survey 2 offered few surprises. The post-survey showed some change from the pre-survey, but for the most part, participants stayed in the range of their original answers. It was anticipated that some responses would change after knowing Ezekiel Baptist Church's mission statement and the working definition of a biblical community. For example, on community (we have a powerful sense of community), 1 participant went from a disagree somewhat on survey 1 to

strongly agree on survey 2. The same participant increased their response on understanding Ezekiel's mission statement from "strongly disagree" to "agree." Interestingly one participant reduced their answer from "agree" to "disagree somewhat" for the statement "Leaders understand the church's culture."[12]

Vision statement. After reviewing the work on the vision statement at the last session, I suggested that the vision statement needed to include a generational statement, not just in age diversity but also longevity. The correct working definitions of *community* and *generation* were restated since some defined *community* as those who live in the same neighborhood as Ezekiel, and *generation* as different age groups. However, the participants were reminded that, for this project, community referred to members of Ezekiel and generation meant longevity. Once the participants understood the definitions, they began wordsmithing the vision statement.

After working diligently to wordsmith the vision statement, the group created the following vision statement for Ezekiel: "We are building a multi-generational community called by God, to be accountable to God and each other in unity to glorify God with one mind and one voice for future generations." Participants were joyful that they were able to create a foundation for the future of Ezekiel through the creation of a vision statement.

The participants set goals and objectives for getting young adults more involved by starting leadership development. They firmly believed that the survival of Ezekiel was dependent on developing leadership training, assisting youth in overcoming being "withered Christians,"[13] and strengthening young families. Participants wanted to

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[12] Table key: SD – Strongly disagree, D- Disagree, DS- Disagree somewhat, AS – Agree somewhat, A- Agree, SA- Strongly agree. ( ) the number of responses. Survey 1- (9) respondents, some did not answer statement. Survey 3- (7) respondents

[13] *Withered Christian* is a person who is attending church but not maturing.

create a ministry for training teenagers in church leadership by having teenagers working alongside elders, deacons, trustees, and ministry leaders.[14]

Conclusion

The Zoom meetings confirmed that by introducing Scripture to members through the sermons, Ezekiel Baptist Church would understand that they would need to change from being a congregation to become a community. The change in understanding what a biblical community is allows Ezekiel to go from being a congregation to become a community. The surveys and Zoom meetings allowed me to understand the existing culture of Ezekiel better. The next chapter will explore the findings of this project and how this research can assist the elders in their leading of Ezekiel.

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[14] See appendix 7 for goal and objectives.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

This chapter will analyze the purpose and goals, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this research, and share my reflections and offer a conclusion.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

For its purpose, this project was to lead EBC from being a congregation to become a community. This purpose grew while serving EBC for the last twenty-seven years as its senior pastor. I initially wanted to restore EBC's community; however, as the research developed, the project changed from restoring community to leading EBC from being a congregation to becoming a community. Tim Hegg's writing on community heavily influenced the change in this research.

As I reflected on EBC, it appeared to that EBC was serving as a congregation, not as a community. As I studied Acts 2:42-47, the apparent differences between the church in Acts and EBC were realized. The turning point for me was in Acts 2:42 when Luke describes the church as being *devoted*. The word *devoted* means to have an unflinching perseverance. I began to dream and I asked myself, could EBC be the same type of community as seen in Acts? My rationale was that the church in Acts and EBC have the same Lord, Father, and Holy Spirit. If Hebrews 13:8, which states that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever," can be contextualized to EBC, then the possibility is available for community. I also asked, what would it take for EBC to become a community like the church in Acts 2:42-47? EBC is a good church; EBC is loving, kind, supportive, and at times generous. However, EBC still has more significant potential if it can become a more biblical community, as seen in Acts 2:42.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Three goals assisted to see if a change was possible: (1) assess the stated and actual beliefs of Ezekiel Baptist Church as they pertained to community, (2) increase the church's understanding of what community means in a biblical context and (3) produce a vision statement.

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess the stated and actual beliefs of Ezekiel Baptist Church as they pertained to community. The background readings for this project made it abundantly clear that before any organizational culture can change, the current culture must first be understood. Survey 1 aided in an understanding of the culture of EBC. The surveys and Zoom meetings indicated that the culture of EBC was fundamentally sound in biblical beliefs, prayer, and love for each other. However, EBC was weaker in life-to-life interactions. Fellowship among believers is a crucial component of a community. In survey 1, participants scored fellowship highly as a core value, but in the same survey, scored EBC lower on, "we encourage fellowshipping during the week." Participants also pointed out that too many EBC members are weak when it comes to living out EBC's mission statement. Being the pastor of EBC for twenty-seven years, I thought I understood the culture of EBC. However, I was ignorant about what members thought about the culture in EBC. Both pre-survey 1 and post-survey 2 showed overall that the participants have a favorable view of the culture in EBC. This research wanted to understand the actual culture of EBC. Knowing the ten participants had a favorable view of EBC's culture, there is hope in going from being a congregation to becoming a community.

Goal 2

The second goal was to increase the church's understanding of what community means in a biblical context. Introducing Scripture during the sermons and Zoom meetings helped EBC understand what a biblical community can be. Introducing Scripture was the

main manipulative in this project during the sermon series phase. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Hebrews 4:12 shows that Scripture should influence the thoughts of the participants. This project showed that new beliefs were formed in the participants as they heard the sermons and reflected on the Scriptures cited. The Scriptures used in the sermon series had a profound impact on how the participants developed the vision statement, how they saw themselves spiritually, and how they view the current state of EBC. The *t*-test confirmed a slight change in the participants with the use of Scripture. Understanding the Scriptures created an urgency within the participants to involve young adults more in leadership and ministry at EBC. Participants recognized that without the leadership development of young adults, EBC runs the risk of not enduring from one generation to the next.

The measure for this goal included a post-training survey. The goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent on the use of Scripture demonstrated a positive statistical difference between pre- and post-training survey scores: $(t_{(9)} = -1.898, p\ 0.045)$.

As stated in chapter 4, Romans 15:15-16 is the Scripture that gave the foundation in building the vision statement. Acts 2:42-47 gave the participants a better understanding of how Christ wants His church to be. Participants conceded that EBC has much work to do using the church's example in Acts 2:42-47. However, participants believe that EBC can be just as effective in ministry by following the church's pattern in Acts 2:42-47. The goal of increasing EBC's understanding of community in a biblical context through Scripture was accomplished. Table 4 shows the changes between the pre and post-surveys.

Table 4. Pre- and post-survey responses

	Pre-Survey Responses	Post-Survey Responses
We have a powerful sense of community	AS (4), A (5)	DS (1) AS (4) A (1) SA (1)
Members fellowship regularly outside of worship service	DS (1) AS (6) A (1)	DS (2) AS (3) A (1) SA (1)
The Bible is authoritative	A (1) SA (7)	A (2), SA (5)
Prayer is a core value of our church	A (4) SA (4)	AS (1), A (2) SA (4)
Members are accountable to the Lord and the church	AS (1) A (4) SA (4)	AS (2), A (2) SA (3)
I know the church's mission statement	SD (1) D (3) AS (2) A (3)	A (5) AS (2)
Fellowshipping is a core value of our church	AS (1) A (6) SA (2)	AS (2) A (3) SA (2)
Bible Study is a core value of our church	A (4) SA (5)	AS (1) A (3) SA (3)
Corporate prayer is emphasized in our church	D (1) AS (2) SA (6)	AS (2) A (2) SA (3)
Members of Ezekiel attend Bible Study, Sunday School, or life groups regularly	D (1) DS (1) AS (3) A (3) SA (1)	DS (2) AS (3) A (1) SA (1)
The congregation accepts our leadership	AS (3) A (6)	AS (3) A (2D) SA (2)
Our church is unified	AS (5) A (3)	AS (4) A (2) SA (1)
Our leaders are good followers	AS (3) A (6)	AS (4) A (2) SA (1)
The congregation feels valued by the leadership	AS (3) A (4) SA (2)	AS (3) A (3) SA (1)
The congregation believes they are partners with the leadership	D (1) DS (1) AS (4) A (3)	DS (1) AS (4) SA (2)
The congregation understands the church's vision	DS (1) AS (6) A (2)	AS (5) A (2)
Leadership has cast a strong and compelling vision	D (1) AS (4) A (4)	AS (4) A (2) SA (1)
Leadership understands the church's culture	AS (5) A (4)	AS (5) A (2)
Our church emphasizes life groups	DS (2) AS (2) A (5)	AS (3) A (4)
Our church has a high view of Scripture	A (2) SA (7)	AS (1) A (2) SA (4)

Goal 3

The third goal was to work with a group of key leaders to produce a new vision statement for the church that reflected an understanding of a biblical community. The creation of the vision statement demonstrated that the participants grasped the concept of a congregation versus a community.

It was a joy to see the transformation and bonding of the participants. All the participants had a strong commitment to Christ and EBC, which was one reason for their

selection. The participants took their role responsibly and wanted to create a template for the current membership of EBC and preserve the future of EBC. It was evident during the Zoom meetings that the participants shared a concern about the current life-to-life interactions within EBC. What pleased and encouraged the participants was the creation of the vision statement. To the participants, the vision statement gives EBC a foundation and guide for generations. The goal of creating a vision statement was met because the participants saw the future of EBC in the vision statement.

Strengths of the Project

There were many strengths and weaknesses of this project. However, this section will limit my comments to three main strengths and three main weaknesses. One strength of this research was that the surveys allowed key leaders at EBC to see itself, assess itself, and make changes that will guide EBC to complete its mission for the Lord. In the fifty-eight years of EBC's existence, no research has been conducted to determine if the church is fulfilling its mission statement. EBC members have participated in surveys to understand who they are, but none have evaluated if they are on target in their mission for the Lord. EBC needed to have something in writing to guide the elders and the members in their kingdom work. The surveys created a vehicle for which members could express how they saw the Lord leading EBC. This project was a start in the direction of evaluating if EBC is on target with its mission and vision. Periodically conducting surveys is an excellent way for church leaders to gauge where the congregation is concerning attitudes and fulfilling the church's mission and vision.

The second strength of this research was the diversity of the participants. Having different genders, ages, and responsibilities within EBC gave voice to different views. The different views provided a better understanding of the culture, beliefs, and concerns of EBC. Additionally, the diversity of the group opened up ideas on how to improve the ministry of EBC. While older and younger members worked together, they developed a better understanding of each other. It was good to hear how both groups

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validated each other's points. Seeing older and younger members serving together and respecting each other is reminiscent of Paul's instructions to Titus in Titus 2:1-6. Just like the universal church of Jesus, so too is EBC. Jesus designed His church to be diverse with different genders and different age groups.

The final strength of this project was the alignment with Scripture for change. Second Timothy 3:16-17 states, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Scripture forces the one searching for truth to evaluate himself as to whether he aligns with God. Survey 1 showed that EBC has a high view of Scripture, and that view kept the participants balanced in creating the vision statement. In the Christian context, there is no change in godly behavior outside of Scripture and God. The research intentionally used Scripture for the power it brings in changing a church's culture.

Weaknesses of the Project

The first weakness of this project was that the entire congregation was not surveyed. Surveying the congregation would have given a more in-depth insight into the culture of EBC. Having data from the congregation first, the research method would have been a sequential mix-method. However, COVID-19 restrictions were placed by the government which prevented the congregation as a whole from being surveyed.

A second weakness was my role as researcher/pastor. The weakness occurred during the creation of the vision statement. Fighting the impulse in directing the participants as they struggled with forming the vision statement was a struggle. I stressed over the time constraints with meeting with the ten participants so I intervened. In retrospect, by intervening too soon, I may have prevented someone from asserting themselves as a leader. I would have liked to have seen if someone would have emerged as a leader, and that leader would guide the group in the completion of the vision statement. However, as the sessions progressed, it became apparent that the participants

were becoming tired; thus, I intervened. Meeting for four weeks in succession had begun taking its toll on the participants by session 3. The pressure to get the vision statement done in light of the participants' tiredness caused me to intervene at times rather than be an observer. As a result, participants became dependent on me at times. I would have preferred to see how the participants created a vision statement from scratch after giving them instructions rather than giving them a starting statement. By allowing the participants to create the vision statement on their own, it would have given greater credibility to the understanding of community. In conjunction with the vision statement pressure, I would have preferred to have spent more time on the goals and objectives for the vision statement.

The third weakness of the project was in survey 1; it was not clear about which leader a statement was referring to—not being clear about which leader the statement referred to caused confusion with some of the participants. Two participants commented on the ambiguity of the leader statements. Additionally, the survey would have been enhanced by knowing how the participants separately viewed the pastor, elders, deacons, and ministry heads. Had it been defined as to which leader a statement was referring to, it is believed that the answers would have been different.

What I Would Do Differently

One of the things I would do differently would be to make sure all participants turned in the first survey ahead of the first meeting. At least four participants completed survey 1 after the first session. Having survey 1 completed earlier than the first meeting would have reduced or even eliminated survey contamination. I do not know for sure if any of the surveys' answers would have been different for those four participants

Another thing I would do would be to better plan how I utilized the time I would have with participants. By not anticipating time fatigue, there was not enough time to go deeper into goals and objectives in the vision statement. Although I fully

appreciated the sacrifice of time given by participants and was pleased with their efforts, having more goals and objectives would have been ideal.

The last thing I would have done differently would be to use an online platform for the survey to assess the congregation as an alternative for the hard copy format with COVID-19 restrictions in place. Had the congregation been surveyed, I would have used a focus group to interpret the larger group's survey results.

Theological Reflections

With every challenge I face, God either reinforces what I understood about Him already, or I learn something new. In this project, God was reinforcing what I already understood about Him. In this project, God reinforced oneness. God only operates on oneness. The understanding that God operates only in oneness came from studying Jesus' intercessory prayer in John 17 and Ephesians 4:1-6. I observed in the participants the reality of God operating through unity during the Zoom sessions. As the participants reflected on Acts 2:42-47 they began to see themselves. In seeing themselves, participants acknowledged the need for EBC to be more unified in doing ministry.

Seeing the participants unify through Scripture gave me a second theological reflection. The way the participants unified reminded me of Jesus' words in John 10:27: "My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me." I cannot recall any disagreements nor subtle but forceful opinions from any of the ten participants for what they believed Christ wanted from EBC. They were united in desiring EBC to glorify Christ. My third and final reflection is the impact of Scripture.

The motivation for this project came after studying Acts 2:42-47. This project was predicated on whether Scripture could influence the thoughts of the ten participants. Scripture impacted me during the project by how it helped me stay on track during the creation of the vision statement. Understanding the impact of Scripture, I wanted to observe the process of how Scripture impacted others. It was amazing and encouraging to see

growth in the ten participants through the use of Scriptures. All of the participants reflected during the Zoom sessions how Scripture gave clarity to what they were doing and how they felt a sense of accomplishment by following Scripture. God's Word is right when it says in Proverbs 16:3, "Commit your activities to the LORD, and your plans will be established." The vision statement for EBC was established.

<div align="center">Personal Reflections</div>

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity" (2 Pet 3:18). Through this project I learned more about myself and His plans for EBC. Being a pastor is very humbling. Humbling not in being made low by the Lord, but in Christ's power. Many times during this process I reminded myself of 2 Corinthians 12:9a: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.'" At times I felt strength leaving me and hope dwindling, while frustration, bewilderment, and anger rose. A great sense of fear and inadequacy flooded my mind as I faced numerous challenges during this project. However, when I put trust in the Lord and relied on His strength, wisdom, and love for me, 2 Corinthians 12:9 became real.

The more I researched, the more energized I became in completing this project. As I began seeing EBC through the eyes of the Lord, a greater sense of commitment for the future of EBC blossomed. I envisioned ministries in EBC extending their reach in ministry. The joy of seeing more young adults coming to faith in Christ and being discipled for generations erupted volcanic praise to the Lord. I recalled that a few weeks after being called to be the pastor of EBC I had meditated about my predecessor, the late Paul McCoy. McCoy left EBC with a good foundation when he died. When I became the pastor, I was determined to build on the foundation laid by McCoy, and I asked the Lord to let me leave EBC for my successor the way McCoy left it for me. This project is one of the ways I will leave EBC stable for my successor. Watching the ten participants start the process of building EBC toward a biblical community humbled me. Witnessing the ten participants'

implicit trust in me as their pastor was one of the most gratifying experiences in my twenty-seven years as their pastor.

Lastly, even though I could see that God was with me, I recognized the need to exercise patience better. The National Basketball Association's Philadelphia 76'ers had a slogan, "Trust The Process," and that slogan fitted me. I had to trust the Lord with what He was doing in this project process. Sometimes anxiousness pushed me to act ahead of God. Fortunately, I was able to temper my reactions because I rested more in the Lord. It was not easy, especially at certain times. However, the Lord continually, through different people or circumstances, reminded me to "trust the process." At times, my frustration was raised like a barometer, but rather than having a hurricane; I had scattered showers. Sometimes the showers passed, but other times it showered heavily. But through it all, the Lord brought me through.

Conclusion

The early church became a community by holding the same beliefs. In addition, the early church gained favor with God and won the respect of non-believers. Many of those non-believers were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47). Given that the early church was unified, God used them because God operates only in unity.

To be a community in the biblical sense means a group of people share the same belief, the gospel of Jesus Christ, have fellowship (life-to life interactions), and share common goals. For EBC to go from congregation to community, it also needed to re-envision itself.

EBC has done good work for the kingdom; however, the time has come for the current membership to make changes to ensure EBC continues to assist in building the Lord's kingdom. Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold write, "Our work is not just temporal, for our time and place, but we gaze beyond our time into eternity. It is not

about building a large congregation; it is about making an impact that outlasts time."[1] In understanding Malphurs and Penfold's point about making an impact that outlasts time, EBC must go from congregation to community.

This project is beneficial in aiding the elders of EBC. Elders have the responsibility to lead, protect, prepare members for ministry, and pray for EBC. No longer can the elders lead without a clear understanding of the culture in EBC. The elders should use the information in this research to develop plans on how they will lead EBC and develop future leaders in EBC. The elders should continue the trend of obtaining surveys from the members of EBC to ensure the members understand the mission and vision of EBC. I appreciated hearing one of the participants say that having a vision statement will allow a person to decide if EBC is where one can serve and worship. It was also appreciated hearing from another participant that the vision statement gives a measuring tool for members to evaluate whether they are serving correctly.

Having a vision statement does not guarantee that EBC will remain true to its vision. However, for now, EBC at least has a foundation from which to build for generations to come. One participants said at the end of the final session, "Ezekiel will be a different church if we implement this vision statement."

This project shows that when Scripture is introduced to members in EBC, there is a shift in beliefs and actions. However, more study is needed to determine if the sermon series and vision statement will lead EBC from being a congregation to becoming a community. It was observed that the participants began seeing the necessity of being a community rather than being a congregation, and for that I am grateful to the Lord. I conclude with my hope found in the following verse: "But I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day" (2 Tim 1:12b).

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[1] Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *Re: Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 7.

APPENDIX 1

SURVEY 1

Project Pre-Survey

The research in which you are about to participate in is designed to obtain information about the spiritual culture in Ezekiel. This research is being conducted by Pastor King for collecting data for dissertation research. In this research, you will be asked to complete a survey before the meetings begin and another at the end of the study. Additionally, you will be asked to participate in weekly discussion sessions for four consecutive weeks via zoom. For the purposes of this study, all meetings will be recorded. Any information you provide will be held *strictly* confidential and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. ***Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time***.

Male _____ Female _____ (please check one)

Age _____

Years of church membership _____

Leader in church _____yes _____no

For each of the statements below, please circle the number below for the response that best characterizes how you feel about the statement where: 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = disagree somewhat 4 = agree somewhat 5 = agree 6 = strongly agree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly agree
I believe in the headship of Christ	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our pastor is the under shepherd for Christ	1	2	3	4	5	6
The Bible is authoritative	1	2	3	4	5	6
There is accountability in our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
Members are accountable to the Lord and the church	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly agree
We work to serve one another	1	2	3	4	5	6
We have a powerful sense of community	1	2	3	4	5	6
Members fellowship regularly outside worship service	1	2	3	4	5	6
Prayer is one of the primary means which God uses to change people's hearts.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Members of Ezekiel attend Bible Study, Sunday School, or life groups regularly	1	2	3	4	5	6
It is vital that every member who has a legitimate need, have that need met	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our church is unified	1	2	3	4	5	6
I know the church's mission statement	1	2	3	4	5	6
We are excited about worship at our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
We make sure all member's spiritual and material needs are met	1	2	3	4	5	6
We encourage fellowshipping during the week.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our worship services exalt Christ.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Praying is a core value of our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
Fellowshipping is a core value of our church.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Bible Study is a core value of our church.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our church emphasizes life groups	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our church has a high view of Scriptures	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sunday School is important to our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
Corporate prayer is emphasized in our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
Corporate prayer helps me feel connected to our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
We look out for the needs of our congregation	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly agree
We have strong attendance at our prayer meetings	1	2	3	4	5	6
We have strong leaders	1	2	3	4	5	6
We have unity among our leaders	1	2	3	4	5	6
We respect all of our leaders	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our leaders see themselves as servant-leaders	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation accepts our leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation accepts the elder's leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation accepts the deacon's leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our leaders are good followers	1	2	3	4	5	6
The elders are leading well	1	2	3	4	5	6
We have strong leadership development	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our leaders take the time to understand the congregation's concerns	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation feels valued by leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation believes leadership values their opinions	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation believes they are partners with the leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
Leadership involves the congregation in decision making process	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation is honest with leadership about how they feel	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our leaders ignore the congregation	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation resists our leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation trusts the leadership of the church	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation is confident in the leadership's skills	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly agree
The congregation is confident in the leadership's abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation is confident in the leadership's character.	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation is confident in the leadership's competency	1	2	3	4	5	6
Leadership communicates well with the congregation	1	2	3	4	5	6
Leadership over-communicates to the congregation.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Leadership has cast a strong and compelling vision	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation understands the church's vision	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation is in alignment with the church's vision	1	2	3	4	5	6
Leadership involves the congregation in change processes	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation must be as ethical and as moral as the leaders	1	2	3	4	5	6
We can accomplish goals even if we are unethical	1	2	3	4	5	6
Leadership understands the church's culture	1	2	3	4	5	6
There is too much division in our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
Leadership welcomes input from the congregation	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation feel empowered by the leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
A person's character is more important to be qualified to serve than skill	1	2	3	4	5	6

SURVEY 2 (POST-SURVEY)

Project Post-Survey

The research in which you are about to participate in is designed to obtain information about the spiritual culture in Ezekiel. This research is being conducted by Pastor King for collecting data for dissertation research. In this research, you will be asked to complete a survey before the meetings begin and another at the end of the study. Additionally, you will be asked to participate in weekly discussion sessions for four consecutive weeks via zoom. For the purposes of this study, all meetings will be recorded. Any information you provide will be held *strictly* confidential and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. ***Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time***.

Male __X_ Female ____ (please check one)

Age __55_

Years of church membership ___6___

Leader in church ____yes __X_no

For each of the statements below, please circle the number below for the response that best characterizes how you feel about the statement where: 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = disagree somewhat 4 = agree somewhat 5 = agree 6 = strongly agree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly agree
We have a powerful sense of community	1	2	3	4	5	6
Members fellowship regularly outside of worship service	1	2	3	4	5	6
The Bible is authoritative	1	2	3	4	5	6
Prayer is a core value of our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
Members are accountable to the Lord and the church	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly agree
I know the church's mission statement	1	2	3	4	5	6
Fellowshipping is a core value of our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
Bible Study is a core value of our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
Corporate prayer is emphasized in our church	1	2	3	4	5	6
Members of Ezekiel attend Bible Study, Sunday School, or life groups regularly	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation accepts our leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our church is unified	1	2	3	4	5	6
I know the church's mission statement	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our leaders are good followers	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation feels valued by the leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation believes they are partners with the leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
The congregation understands the church's vision	1	2	3	4	5	6
Leadership has cast a strong and compelling vision	1	2	3	4	5	6
Leadership understands the church's culture	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our church emphasizes life groups	1	2	3	4	5	6
Our church has a high view of Scriptures	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX 3

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CREATING A VISION STATEMENT

Is God's vision of Ezekiel our vision?
How will we know God's vision?
1. Does our vision align with Scripture?
2. It must be too big to pull off on our own
3. We must be passionate about the vision.

How can we help Ezekiel see the vision?

Where are we going?

How will we get there?

What will it look like when we get there?

Does our vision take risks for God?

Is the vision statement exciting that you want to be a part of it?
Is our vision future-focused?

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals are considered the larger, more general concept, with objectives providing support for their measurement and accountability. Objectives are short-term, measurable steps designed to move the organization towards achieving the long-term goals.

We need to ask what needs to happen?

APPENDIX 4

VISION STATEMENT AND VISION SCRIPTURE

"We are building a multi-generational Christian community called by God, to be accountable to God and each other in unity to glorify God with one mind and one voice for future generations."

"Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, according to Christ Jesus, so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one mind and one voice." Romans 15:5-6 (CSBBible)

APPENDIX 5

PRE-TEST, POST-TEST, SURVEY RESULTS
AND T-TEST COMPUTATION

Table A1 and A 2 represent the pre-test survey statements. Tables A3 and A4 are post-survey results (1) results(s) represents statements. Respondents were given 20 statements (S) to respond to. Abbreviations are (m/f): sex number (age) (n/y): leader in church number (years of membership)

Table A1. Pre-test results for statements 1-10

Pre-test results	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
Participants										
1 (m) 21 (n) 16	2	4	6	5	5	2	4	5	4	3
2 (f) 36 (n) 5	3	4		5	5	1	5	5	2	2
3 (f) 46 (y) 24	4	4	6	6	6	4	5	6	6	2
4 (f) 49 (y) 8	4	4	6	5	5	5	5	5	4	4
5 (f) 66 (n) 5	5	5	6	6	6	4	5	5	5	6
6 (f) 70 (y) 39	4	5	5	5	5	2	5	6	6	4
7 (m) 55 (y) 6	5	2	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	5
8 (m) 66 (n) 5	4	3	6	6	4	4	4	6	6	4
9 (m) 58 (y) 10	4	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	2
10 (m) 51 (y) 21	4	4	6	6	5	3	6	6	6	5

Table A2. Pre-test results for statements 11-20

Pre-test results	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	
Participants											Pre-test Total
1 (m) 21 (n) 16	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	6	81
2 (f) 36 (n) 5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	3	5	74
3 (f) 46 (y) 24	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	6	89
4 (f) 49 (y) 8	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	95
5 (f) 66 (n) 5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	6	103
6 (f) 70 (y) 39	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	6	96
7 (m) 55 (y) 6	5	4	5	6	4	4	4	4	5	6	99
8 (m) 66 (n) 5	5	5	5	4	3	4	5	5	5	6	94
9 (m) 58 (y) 10	6	5	6	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	109
10 (m) 51 (y) 21	6	6	6	5	6	4	5	6	6	5	106

Table A3. Post-test results for statements 1-10

Post-test results	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
1 (m) 21 (n) 16	4	3	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	3
2 (f) 36 (n) 5	6	4	6	6	5	5	6	5	4	4
3 (f) 46 (y) 24	4	4	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	4
4 (f) 49 (y) 8	4	4	6	4	4	5	4	5	4	4
5 (f) 66 (n) 5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	5
6 (f) 70 (y) 39	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	4
7 (m) 55 (y) 6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
8 (m) 66 (n) 5	4	3	6	6	5	3	4	6	6	5
9 (m) 58 (y) 10	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
10 (m) 51 (y) 21	4	4	6	6	5	4	6	6	6	6

Table A4. Post-test results for statements 11-20

Post-test results	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	Post-Test Total
1 (m) 21 (n) 16	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	6	86
2 (f) 36 (n) 5	5	4	4	5	3	4	4	4	4	5	93
3 (f) 46 (y) 24	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	6	95
4 (f) 49 (y) 8	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	87
5 (f) 66 (n) 5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	100
6 (f) 70 (y) 39	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	6	101
7 (m) 55 (y) 6	6	6	5	5	6	5	6	5	5	6	115
8 (m) 66 (n) 5	5	4	5	5	4	3	5	5	5	6	95
9 (m) 58 (y) 10	6	5	6	6	6	5	5	3	5	6	111
10 (m) 51 (y) 21	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	5	111

Table A5. *T*-test calculations

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	Pre-test Total	Post Test Total
Mean	94.6	99.4
Variance	118.9333333	103.1555556
Observations	10	10
Pearson Correlation	0.713830867	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	9	
t Stat	-1.898025747	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.045086132	
t Critical one-tail	1.833112933	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.090172265	
t Critical two-tail	2.262157163	

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ABSTRACT

LEADING EZEKIEL BAPTIST CHURCH IN
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA, FROM
CONGREGATION TO COMMUNITY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
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The purpose of this research was to lead Ezekiel Baptist from a congregation to a community. The research showed that by introducing Scripture to select members of Ezekiel Baptist Church, their beliefs would change, thus beginning the transformation of becoming a community.

Chapter 1 details the introduction to the research. Chapter 2 describes a theological review of Acts 2:42-47. Chapter 3 details how a Christian community lives by focusing on the unique roles of a leader and follower. Chapter 4 describes the process of obtaining information from ten participants. Chapter 5 explains the strength and weaknesses of the project.

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