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DEVELOPING A SMALL GROUP STRUCTURE THAT
CULTIVATES DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSIONAL
LIVING AT CHEROKEE BAPTIST CHURCH
IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Educational Ministry

by
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December 2017

APPROVAL SHEET

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To my wonderful wife,
who loves and cares so well;
to our boys,
who make each day an adventure,
and to our girls,
who made us a real family.

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PREFACE

As I began this degree program at Southern Seminary in the area of church revitalization, the need for this project was evident in our church. When I transitioned to biblical spirituality, the project was further strengthened through the course lectures, reading, and seminar projects. It has been a privilege to have the opportunity to study with the professors and fellow pastors at Southern Seminary. Chief among them I owe my sincerest thanks to Dr. Joe Harrod for his generosity in time and commitment to serving me as supervisor and friend.

To my beautiful and supportive wife, Alicia, who has made this project happen in countless thoughtful and supportive ways, thank you. Thank you for caring for our family on long weeks away. I end every day happier with you than the day before. I am grateful for our four children, who I hope will be shaped and influenced by the maturity in Christ that we pray will result from the work of this project. The surprise addition of our twin daughters during the crunch of project implementation made us depend on Christ more urgently and became the most enjoyable season in recent memory. I am especially grateful for the saints at Cherokee Baptist, who have become a real family and whose support, honor, and encouragement to me as their shepherd has carried us through difficult seasons. Thank you for allowing me to serve with gladness.

Jeremy Wright

Memphis, Tennessee

December 2017

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The people of God need one another for growth in Christlikeness. Contrary to our inclinations, godliness is not formed in a vacuum, but rather by the careful nourishment, exhortation, encouragement, and correction of fellow saints who have been given access to our lives. Then, as we grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus, we are equipped and motivated to take that grace to those who have not yet believed this good news. Therefore, the aim of this project is to develop a structure that will cultivate discipleship and missional engagement by establishing a small group structure.

Context

This project took place at Cherokee Baptist Church (CBC) in Memphis, Tennessee. CBC was established in 1953 and has a resident membership of 500 people. The average weekly attendance in Sunday worship and children's ministry is 130. A number of connected factors contribute to the need for a small group structure to cultivate discipleship and mission. The age of the church body, lack of clear discipleship process, poor understanding and application of the gospel through church-unity, and missing missional efforts each played a part. CBC is the product of three mergers. CBC merged with Glenn Park Baptist Church in 1979 in an effort to move East within the city of Memphis as their neighborhood underwent economic and cultural change for which they did not adapt. In 2001 they merged with Southland Baptist Church, absorbing a smaller dying congregation into their building and church life. In 2003 they merged with Beverly Hills Baptist Church, the final and most substantial merger. Beverly Hills was a formerly growing church that had stabilized in the midst of a changing neighborhood. These two

very different church cultures clashed in a way that quickly brought the average attendance back to pre-merger levels within a year following the two churches coming together. CBC has a need for developing a structured program that will support developing disciples and sending them into daily life as missionaries.

Age

In 2014, the median age of attending members of CBC hovered around 73 years old. At that point fifty-two percent of the congregation was over age 70. The church was financially and numerically stable, but found itself unable to engage a surrounding neighborhood that was predominately early and middle age families.¹ Additions to church membership were largely grandchildren of members whose parents did not attend, or elderly peers of members who were transferring from nearby churches. The need for church revitalization was evident in both the age of the congregation facing decline and in a lack of discipleship.

Discipleship

The practice of revivalistic, topical preaching and low standards of church membership communicated poor expectations for discipleship to church members.² There is no written or clearly explained discipleship process. Discipleship was limited to Sunday morning small group Bible studies, sporadic gender specific weeknight studies through published material, and weekly Sunday morning and evening preaching services. People encountered God's word and stirred one another up to love in good deeds in those contexts. In my time at CBC, I have worked to establish expositional preaching and

¹As of the 2010 US Census, there were 7,771 people living within a one-mile radius of CBC. The largest grouping of those people were aged 30 to 60. Information based on a report ordered from ESRI Business Analysts through the North American Mission Board on August 6, 2012 that provided an analysis of 2010 US Census data for the 1 mile, 5 mile, and 10 mile radius from CBC's building location.

²The historical records of the church were kept meticulously through latter half of the twentieth century, and they reveal topical sermon series patterns, inflated membership numbers, and a lack of church discipline.

practical encouragement to discipleship, but I failed to develop and institute a clear process of discipleship. There remained a need to develop and communicate clear plan for growth in Christ-likeness within the community of the church.

Lacking Visible Unity

Merging churches can be an effective advance of kingdom purposes in a neighborhood. It can also be a combination of dying churches to form a numerically larger church that is likely more financially stable in the short term as a result of selling the real estate of one congregation. Unfortunately, CBC's legacy of church mergers has not left it a spiritually stronger church, even as it improved the church's financial outlook. CBC's unity suffers because some members cling to the identity of their former church.

Mission

The age, weak grip on the gospel in discipleship, and lack of visible unity contributed to the final contextual factor for change, missing missional engagement. Evangelism was program-centered. Children's ministry outreach through AWANA, Vacation Bible School, and a puppet ministry formed the largest missional arm of evangelistic structure. There was no active process for adult evangelism. As we attempted to move evangelism out of a program-centered effort and into the daily lives of our members, many were struggling to engage. There was a need for a structure for equipping for evangelism and encouraging evangelism among fellow members.

Rationale

As a church, CBC grew dissatisfied with the pattern of decline. Watching similar bodies in our metro area close has increased the congregation's desire to grow as a church. The problem this project sought to correct is the answer to the question of how a gospel ministry might thrive at CBC for decades to come through intentional

discipleship and missional living.³ Our previous track record of church structure and a poorly detailed process of discipleship precipitated a need for decisive reformation. Previously, the church touted much higher conversion and addition rates than people who have actually remained involved in the church. In contrast, this project is built on the assumption that the first step in church growth is equipping the existing saints for the work of ministry. Central to that work is the renewal and preparation of church members with a larger, more awe-inspiring view of Christ in the gospel. This project argues that the addition of a small group structure for discipleship and missional engagement can serve as one element toward that greater, awe-inspiring, transformational view of Christ.

The work of this project was to meet the dissatisfaction with decline with a biblical method for church development and growth through discipleship and mission. The aim of this project was to see CBC members embrace the biblical imperative for their own sanctification through Christ in community. Helping them understand and begin to apply God's word to a pursuit of personal holiness was pivotal to our revitalization and church growth.

Key to awakening members who have existed in church decline for years is a sight of the risen and reigning Christ. The gospel news must be more than assumed and given to unbelievers, it must be digested and applied to the saints within the community for the purpose of growth and mission. As the gospel and its missionary imperatives take root, a secondary need for revitalization and church growth is for members to turn from inward preferences to outward mission. Considering that Jesus left heaven to endure an earthly life of discomfort and cruel death on our behalf propels us to take up our cross on his mission as well. The aim of this project was to produce an avenue for members to engage in thoughtful gospel application with other believers so that they might grow and join God's mission to their neighborhood.

³See definitions section below for a discussion of mission/missional.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a small group structure that cultivates discipleship and missional living at Cherokee Baptist church in Memphis, Tennessee.

Goals

To develop a small group structure to cultivate discipleship and missional living is a logical next step in revitalization at CBC. This project aligned our church's mission and vision with more concrete and applicable steps to fulfillment. Achieving the purpose of this project occurred as the three goals were successfully completed.

1. The first goal was to assess relationship, discipleship, and missional understanding and practices among attending members of Cherokee.
2. The second goal was to develop and implement a curriculum among existing small groups that will address deficiencies in understanding and practice discipleship and mission.
3. The third goal of this project was to develop a long-term strategic plan to further this discipleship process in the church.

As our church successfully completes each of these goals we will lay a foundation and a clear path forward for a healthy small group structure that will cultivate discipleship and missional living.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this project included a pre-curriculum survey to assess understanding and practice, the development and implementation of the curriculum, and the establishment of a long-term strategy to mature and multiply small groups launching with the use of the curriculum.⁴ The first goal assessed the current discipleship, relationship, and missional practices among CBC members. In order to

⁴All of the research instruments used in this project was performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

challenge people to engage in growth and mission together, we needed to know what their current practices for spiritual growth and mission look like, as well as how they view and what benefit they see from relationships with other believers. This goal was measured by the use of the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA).⁵ The information collected in this survey assisted in determining the emphases of the curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when 60 percent of attending members of the Core Seminar fully completed the survey. As they completed the TDA, particular attention is given to the areas of discipleship, missional activity, and relationships within the pre- and post-assessments as we teach the interconnected nature of these aspects of the Christian life.

The second goal was to develop and implement a curriculum for the small groups that lays a basis for the groups moving forward. This curriculum focuses on the priorities of growth in grace and missional engagement and the benefits of engaging those practices in a small group context. It was developed for presentation over a six-week meeting period and open to all church members, but attendance is optional. This goal is considered successfully completed when the curriculum material is prepared and deemed sufficient by a peer review panel consisting of at least two elder candidates and small group leaders. The curriculum was measured successful when it scored at least a 90 percent satisfactory level from the peer panel feedback.⁶ Should it have failed to meet an adequate satisfactory level, it would have been revised until such a time as it meets the required level. In addition, to be considered successful a post curriculum delivery TDA must show significant statistical improvement in the understanding of small group ministry and its benefits among those participants in the curriculum. In order to achieve this measurement, we re-issued the TDA among those who attend the sessions to assess

⁵See appendix 1.

⁶See appendix 2 for the Curriculum Evaluation Rubric.

changes in understanding and practice. A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine whether there was a positive statistical difference between the pre-project and post-project questionnaires of participants.

The third and final goal was to create a long-term strategic priority list to establish, nurture, and multiply discipling and missionally engaged groups. As a part of this plan, the curriculum will be revised and edited based on delivery and informal feedback. In addition, the long-term priority list plans for group reproduction, provides lists of material for ongoing training, and produces literature that will orient incoming members to the meetings and rhythm of life shared by the group. This plan also involves recognizing, coaching, and deploying new leaders from within the existing groups to facilitate new groups. Finally, it plans for quarterly group member training sessions and monthly group leader training sessions.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms will be used in the ministry project:

Disciple, discipleship. In the New Testament, two key words are used most commonly in reference to discipleship: μαθητής and ἀκολουθέω.⁷ The *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* defines μαθητής as “pupil, with implication of being an adherent of the teacher.” Similarly, ἀκολουθέω, carries the connotation of hearing and following.⁸ To be a disciple of Christ is to be a

⁷μαθητής is the descriptive noun with verbal form μαθητεύω while ἀκολουθέω is a verbal form meaning “to be a follower or a disciple of someone, in the sense of adhering to the teachings or instructions of a leader and in promoting the cause of such a leader.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 469.

⁸⁸William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 609. In Mark 1:18 Jesus issues the call to follow him and the disciples respond, εὐθὺς ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ “at once they left their nets and followed him.” Again in Matt. 10:24 Οὐκ ἔστιν μαθητής ὑπὲρ τὸν διδάσκαλον “disciple is not above his teacher” and 27:57 ὃς καὶ αὐτὸς ἐμαθητεύθη τῷ Ἰησοῦ “and he was also a disciple of Jesus.” Also Acts 6:1 πληθυνόντων τῶν μαθητῶν “the number of disciples kept growing.” Acts 16:1 καὶ ἰδοὺ μαθητῆς τις ἦν ἐκεῖ ὀνόματι Τιμόθεος “and there was a disciple there named Timothy.”

committed student and follower of Christ.⁹ The process of discipleship is maturing as a disciple, growing in ability and practice of learning and following Christ.¹⁰

Mission, missional. The idea of “mission” varies in definition in modern usage. Some use the term mission in the context of an event, such as a mission; others understand mission to be an indefinable ethos of the Christian life.¹¹ For the purpose of this project, mission is to be understood in terms of the redemptive mission of God. To practice mission is to join God’s mission of people being transferred “from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light” (Col 1:13-14).¹² Understanding mission begins with understanding the missionary heart of God to rescue a people to himself through the gospel of his Son.¹³ Therefore people can say they are “living on mission” and mean that they are participating in the mission of God to redeem people through the gospel of Christ. On the other hand, they might say they are “missional” to mean that they are postured for mission in a particular area or attitude of life.¹⁴ “Missional small groups” are

⁹For more information on discipleship, see Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006); Robby Gallaty and Randall Collins, *Growing Up: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks Pub, 2013); Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009). Jonathan Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

¹⁰Bill Hull helpfully breaks discipleship down into six areas of transformation: mind, character, relationships, habits, service, and influence. Reforming practices in those six areas are the marks of becoming a better follower of Christ. Hull, *Complete Book on Discipleship*, 130-53.

¹¹David Bosch writes, “Ultimately, mission remains undefinable; it should never be incarcerated in the narrow confines of our own predilections. The most we can hope for is to formulate some approximations of what mission is all about.” David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 9.

¹²Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 10. “God’s self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God’s involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate. *Missio Dei* enunciates the good news that God is a God-for-people.”

¹³See Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: B&H Pub. Group, 2006), chs. 1 and 2. Christopher Wright writes in the foreword to *Reformed Means Missional*, “Strictly speaking, the word ‘missional’ means ‘pertaining to, or characterized by, mission’ – in the same way that ‘covenantal’ relates to ‘covenant’ or ‘tribal’ to ‘tribe’ It is not so much that God has a mission for his church in the world; rather, God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God’s mission. ‘Missional church,’ therefore, is something of a tautology (like ‘female women’); if it isn’t missional, it isn’t a church.” Christopher Wright, *Reformed Means Missional: Following Jesus into the World* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2013). IX.

¹⁴Charles Van Engen in an essay titled “Mission” Defined and Described” writes, “With the term missional, I emphasize the essential nature and vocation of the church as God’s called and sent people

small groups that have postured themselves to intentionally and strategically involve themselves in the mission of God to rescue people through the gospel.

Small groups, Missional Communities. Lifeway Christian Resources defines a small group as "A micro-community of 3 to 12 Jesus followers doing the Christian life deeply together."¹⁵ It is a limited group of committed participants banded together for the purpose of spiritual maturation.¹⁶ Small groups at CBC will be called Missional Communities. The title serves as a reminder of the purpose of groups. The group is organized as a community of Christians committed to maturity and mission.

Two delimitations will apply to this project. The first is a voluntary limit as the curriculum will be offered to interested members and not presented in a format where the entire church is assembled. This is intentional to allow those who are comfortable with their current on-campus, Sunday morning small group of Sunday school members to remain in those groups. The goal of this project is not to completely restructure all small groups at CBC, but to begin groups that have a more clearly defined and executed purpose in discipleship and mission. Therefore, the project will be limited to willing participants who volunteer to attend.

Secondly, the project will be confined to a twenty-one week timeframe. This will allow sufficient time to issue and assess surveys, develop and implement curriculum, as well as outline the long-term strategy for group multiplication. Further information

... Following L. Newbigin and others, a church that is missional understands that God's mission calls and sends the church of Jesus Christ, locally and globally, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to be a missionary church in its own society, in the cultures in which it finds itself, and globally among all peoples who do not yet confess Jesus as Lord." Charles Van Engen, "'Mission' Defined and Described," in *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium*, ed. Ed Stetzer and David Hesselgrave (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 24. George Peters describes mission as "the total biblical assignment of the church of Jesus Christ. It is the comprehensive term including the upward, inward, and outward ministries of the church. It is the church as 'sent' (a pilgrim, stranger, witness, prophet, servant, as salt, as light, etc.) in this world." George Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 11.

¹⁵Rick Howerton, "Defining Small Groups," *Basics of a Biblically-driven Small Group*, accessed July 6, 2015, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/defining-small-groups>.

¹⁶For more information see Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communications on Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

about the timeframe can be found in the outline of chapter 4 below.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR A
SMALL GROUP COMMUNITY STRUCTURE
FOR DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Introduction

The thesis of this chapter is that the New Testament teaches that sanctification is a gospel-centered, community-oriented work of God that happens in and through his people and propels them into the work of mission of God. Stated briefly, God sanctifies His people through the gospel in community for mission. Various New Testament passages are addressed indicating the sanctifying power of the gospel, the communal nature of discipleship, and the product of that growth in evangelism and mission.

God’s People Are Sanctified through the Gospel

Douglas Moo writes, “The theme of Christ’s sufficiency for Christian spiritual experience is also woven throughout the fabric of [Colossians].”¹ In the opening half of Colossians, two sections in particular offer imperatives for a Christian to return to Christ and his work for spiritual maturity. In 1:21-23, following Paul’s lofty description of the person and work of Jesus in 1:15-20, he gives a brief summary of the gospel followed by a conditional clause indicating the need for continued and enduring hope in the gospel. A few verses later in 2:6-7, at a point Moo claims is the focal point of the book, Paul instructs the Colossian believers to keep the glorious Christ of 1:15-20 pre-eminent in their thinking and living by way of a short, summarizing imperative.²

¹Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 62.

²Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 177.

The Colossian Problem

What is the context of Colossians that provokes Paul to write about Christ's sufficiency for the church? There are numerous propositions about the "false teaching" addressed by Paul's letter. Moo argues that Paul is offsetting a false teaching as he "uses his teaching about Christ in Colossians especially to make the point that Christians find all that they need in him."³ By "mirror-reading" the text to determine the subject Paul is addressing we can deduce that the some were at least implicitly questioning Christ's sufficiency for their spiritual life and progress.⁴ Richard Melick recognizes 1:9-20 and 2:8-3:4 as the most relevant texts.⁵ He identifies several matters for attention in 2:8-3:4 that inform our understanding of the Colossian problem: "They include: 'fullness' (πλήρωμα) (2:9); 'delights in false humility and the worship of angels' (2:18); 'what he has seen' (2:18); 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!' (2:21); and 'self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body' (2:23)."⁶ Morna Hooker argues that Paul lacks the urgency and specificity present in 1 Corinthians and Galatians and this means that there is no particular false teaching in Colossae but rather Paul is issuing a general warning to a young church.⁷ Moo writes that the cohesive nature of the warnings in chapter 2 suggests a single divisive movement in view throughout the book.⁸ Moo embraces Hooker's protest in so far as it might be credible that the false

³Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 63.

⁴Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 63.

⁵Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 1991), 172.

⁶Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 173.

⁷Morna D. Hooker, "Were There False Teachers in Colossae?" in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: Studies in Honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule*, ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 315–31. Hooker writes, "Paul's teaching in Colossians, then, seems to us to be quite as appropriate to a situation in which young Christians are under pressure to conform to the beliefs and practices of their pagan and Jewish neighbours, as to a situation in which their faith is endangered by the deliberate attacks of false teachers; in view of the absence from Colossians of any clear reference to this supposed error, or hint of distress on Paul's part, this explanation seems to us far more probable" (329).

⁸Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 48.

teachers were not proselytizing but rather carrying an air of superiority based on their religious practices (2:18ff).⁹ The pride of works-based superiority would explain the emphasis to the love and forgiveness based unity imperatives (3:12-17). Paul exhorts the Colossians to put their faith in Christ, not in their performance of rules or rituals. Moo summarizes the Colossian problem well as he writes, “Any teaching that questions the sufficiency of Christ—not only for “initial” salvation but also for spiritual growth and ultimate salvation from judgment—falls under the massive Christological critique of Colossians.”¹⁰

God’s People Hold Fast to the Gospel by Faith to Endure

As he moves on from a span of six verses containing twelve explicit references to Jesus Christ, Paul begins Colossians 1:21 with a second person plural indicating a transition. Having described Christ’s person and work, he turns to their former state: “alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.”¹¹ These seemingly undesirable people have been reconciled to the holy God by means of the righteous life and atoning death of Jesus (v. 22). Hooker captures this contrast within this first chapter well:

Those who were at one time alienated (21) are those who have now been given a share in the inheritance of God’s holy ones (12); those who were hostile in mind and evil deeds (21) are those who have been rescued from the power of darkness (13) and whose calling is the knowledge of God and every good deed (9–10); those who

⁹ Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 48.

¹⁰ Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 60.

¹¹ Similar descriptions of unregenerate: Eph 2:1-3; Titus 1:16. Also, the parallel in Eph 4:18–19: “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.” David W. Pao writes, “The two participles translated as ‘were . . . alienated’ (ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους) form a periphrastic construction that ‘illustrates the emphatic weight the author gives to the state of alienation.’” David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 109. Murray J. Harris notes, “These two ptes., which agree with ὑμᾶς (the dir. obj. of ἀποκατήλλαξεν, v. 22), form a periph. pf. . . . denoting the continuous, settled state of alienation or estrangement from God that was the condition of the Colossians — and Gentiles in general — prior to (cf. ποτε) their reconciliation.” Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 56.

are reconciled through the death of Christ (22) are those who have been transferred into his kingdom (13); those whom he now presents as holy, blameless and irreproachable (22) are those who in him have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (14).¹²

Paul's transition in verse 22 is *vov̄i δέ*, which James Dunn calls a "genuine Paulinism to express this moment of divine reversal."¹³ Paul's uses the "divine reversal" in Col. 1:22 to pick up the theme of God's redemption in Christ of Col. 1:20 and now apply it to man's sin nature detailed in verse 21. Peter O'Brien notes its use to draw "a sharp contrast . . . between the readers' pre-Christian past and their present standing in Christ: 'you were once . . . but now you are.'"¹⁴ This redemptive transformation has come "in [Christ's] body of flesh by his death." As a penal substitute for his people, the broken body of Christ absorbs the wrath that hostile-minded, evil-doing people deserve. In this way, he is able to present them blameless and free from sin. Douglas Moo asserts that the phrase "τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς" highlights the humanity of Christ in his ability and willingness to suffering.¹⁵ Therefore, the emphasis is on Christ's flesh as a sacrificial substitute for the flesh of sinful people, having the likeness of its character but not the substance of its sin.¹⁶ This penal substitution of Christ's body of flesh broken to cleanse an evil people is

¹²Hooker, "False Teachers in Colossae," 321-22.

¹³James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 107. Dunn also notes that this "divine reversal" is also seen in Rom 3:21; 6:22; 7:6; 11:30; 1 Cor 15:20; Phlm. 11.

¹⁴Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Dallas: Word, 1982), 65-66.

¹⁵Moo adds, "The most likely explanation is that the qualification is added to focus attention on Christ's susceptibility to suffering—a nuance that the addition of the phrase through death explicates" (*Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 142).

¹⁶N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2008) highlights two parallel passages that further explain: Rom 7:4 "you also have died to the law through the body of Christ," and Rom 8:3, God "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh." Wright suggests that Jesus fully identified with the sins of humanity. "The cross," he writes, "is simply the outworking of this explosive meeting between the holy God and human sin" (86). Therefore, "those who are members of Jesus' body thus find their sin already condemned in him." Jesus physical flesh, containing both deity and humanity, suffered to expiate alienated, hostile in mind, evil doing people in the flesh (86). Dunn also notes that this combination of two words with similar semantic range in the phrase "τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς" emphasizes the reality of Christ's physical body in response to gnosticism that was likely a part of the syncretistic Colossian problem. He writes, "such an emphasis would have been a bulwark against any Gnostic tendencies that attempted to question the reality of Christ's death: the firstborn of all creation attained his status as firstborn from the dead by experiencing the full reality of

the heart of the gospel. Paul is making explicit the gospel connection between the glorious Christ of 1:15-20 and the broken, sinful human beings of 1:21. Through faith in Christ's broken body sinners receive redemption. His aim in reminding them of the gospel is that they would find it sufficient for their life and godliness contrary to the false teaching to find hope elsewhere (2:3-4, 8-15).

Paul makes this imperative explicit in verse 23 through the use of a conditional clause; you will be made holy through Christ's penal substitution if you hold fast to the gospel.¹⁷ Moo asserts this reference to be the first mention of the central concern of the letter, "to encourage the Colossian Christians to resist the blandishments of the false teachers and to continue to grow in their knowledge of Christ."¹⁸ Paul's imperatival use of the conditional clause to the Colossians sets the framework for the book's discussion about maturity in the Christian walk. Nothing in the Christian life, he warns them, is to be divorced from the hope of the gospel. According to Moo, this clause is best attached to the word "present" in verse 22 and summarized, "God has reconciled you with the purpose of presenting you as holy before him—but you will, in fact, only be presented as holy before him if"¹⁹ His conditional warning to those in Christ is intended to steer them to an enduring faith through the hope of the gospel. O'Brien notes that τῆ πίστει in

physical death (Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 109). Similarly, Peter O'Brien: "The expression 'his body of flesh' appears to be rather heavy. It was evidently a Hebraism meaning 'physical body' and has an exact verbal equivalent in the Qumran literature (1QpHab9:2: 'And they inflicted horrors of evil diseases and took vengeance upon his (sc. the wicked priest's) body of flesh'" (*Colossians-Philemon*, 68). F. F. Bruce also understands it as addressing a gnostic flavor of the issues at Colossae: "insistence on the true incarnation of our Lord was a necessary corrective to the tendency of the Colossian heresy." F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 212.

¹⁷The conditional does not express doubt that they will achieve it's conditions, but it does express the divine requirement that they not shift to other hopes and instead remain steadfast and fixed on the gospel, similar to 2:6-7. Dunn summarizes the matter well when he writes, "Εἰ γὰρ may denote confidence more than doubt (cf. its use in 2 Cor 5:3; Eph 3:2; 4:21), but final acceptance is nevertheless dependent on remaining in the faith" (*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 110). Pao rightly notes, "The focus is rather on the conditionality of the statement as it functions as a call for the Colossian believers to be faithful to the gospel they have received" (*Colossians and Philemon*, 109).

¹⁸Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 143.

¹⁹Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 144.

this context “is another description for the apostolic gospel rather than the subjective response to the Colossians to that gospel.”²⁰ The faith that they are to hold fast to is the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Paul’s tactic in this book is markedly different from his stern and direct tone employed in Galatians addressing false teaching and in 1 Corinthians writing to correct theological and moral shortcomings in the church. In Colossians, Paul goes on the offensive to display Jesus in his glory and the awe-inspiring news of the gospel as an ongoing source of life.²¹ This gospel hope is the sufficient place of rest for the faithful to continue in the faith. By embracing Christ and carrying on in the gospel God’s people will mature and not fall short in perseverance.

God’s People Walk in the Hope of the Gospel to Mature

Moo calls this short paragraph in 2:6-7 “the heart of Colossians . . . it serves as the hinge between the first major section of the letter (1:3-2:5) and the second (2:6-4:6).”²² The first clause of this paragraph summarizes the major theological theme of the letter to this point: Jesus is the Lord and you are invited to live under his lordship. Moo argues that Paul’s concept of receiving in the use of the word *παραλαμβάνω* in 2:6 follows the general range of the word’s common usage of accepting a tradition and bends it in a Christological focus in light of the letter’s subject and intent.²³ “Paul refers here not to the receiving of teaching, or tradition, or the word of God (see 1 Thess 2:13), but of Christ himself.”²⁴ F. F. Bruce summarizes and applies the meaning to the greater context when he writes, “the Colossians have received Christ himself as their ‘tradition,’

²⁰O’Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 69.

²¹Perhaps he is more offensive than defensive because he had never visited this church and was relying on information from Epaphras (1:7; 4:12).

²²Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 177.

²³Harris adds that the use of *παραλαμβάνω* here “denotes not simply passive receipt of Christian tradition but active acceptance of the person who was the essence of that tradition” (*Colossians and Philemon*, 88).

²⁴Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 177–78.

and this should prove sufficient safeguard against following the ‘tradition of men’ (2:8).”²⁵

James Dunn argues that Paul never uses παραλαμβάνω to indicate receiving Christ; it is instead almost universally used for the receiving of tradition.²⁶ According to Dunn, Paul could have used (προς)δέχομαι if he intended to indicate the reception of Christ as in Galatians 4:14 and Romans 16:2.²⁷ “Rather,” he says, “Paul refers his readers back to their experience of hearing and receiving the gospel.”²⁸ Dunn’s argument is countered by Moo in consideration of the object of reception: “τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον.” Moo argues that the general semantic range of “receiving tradition” is guided by the object of that verb, “Christ Jesus the Lord.” He effectively argues that Paul is drawing on the early Christian confessional statement “Jesus Christ is Lord.”²⁹ “By alluding to this confession here at a key transitional point in the letter,” Moo writes, “Paul connects a fundamental expression of what it means to be a Christian with the Christology that he has developed in the earlier part of the letter.”³⁰ This statement is a link to the Christ described in 1:15-20. Even as you, alienated, hostile in mind, evildoers have received this glorious Christ in your conversion, so walk in him after your conversion. If you would continue in the Christian faith, continue by faith in Christ through the gospel.

This ongoing faith in Christ for the Christian life is pictured in one imperative (“ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε”) and four participles (“ἑρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν

²⁵Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 93. Similarly Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 247, writes, “The strong impression from the text is that they actually embraced him, not simply the message. This accords with the complaint about the heretical teaching that it was not “holding fast to the head” (2:19 NASB). The statement means, therefore, that they received Christ as Lord, the Lord discussed in the hymn of 1:15–20. The threat of the false teachers was that they would undermine that understanding of Jesus as the Lord of all.”

²⁶Dunn cites in support 1 Cor 11:23; 15:1; Gal 1:9, 12; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6 (*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 138).

²⁷Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 138.

²⁸Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 138.

²⁹Parallel confessions found in Rom 10:9, 1 Cor 12:3, 2 Cor 4:5, Phil 2:11.

³⁰Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 179.

αὐτῶ καὶ βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ”). The imperative is to “live or behave in a customary manner, with possible focus upon continuity of action — ‘to live, to behave, to go about doing.’”³¹ Paul is proactively directing believers to continue living on Christ in the same manner as they initially began living on him in repentance and faith in the gospel at conversion. The way of perseverance and maturity in Christ is to continue in the gospel.

Following this imperative to continue walking in the Christ received as Lord are four descriptions that define more precisely what is involved in that walking.³² These four participles enforce Paul’s point and according Moo, they “to tell us how we can continue to live a life that gives Christ his rightful place as Lord.”³³ Melick notes that though the first participle ἐρριζωμένοι carries an agricultural connotation and the second participle ἐποικοδομούμενοι a construction context, the two compliment one another to display the work of the church in building and growing directly from the foundation of the faith.³⁴ The first two participles indicate a Christian who, like a tree, is on a solid footing. On of those roots is receiving nourishment and is thereby growing and bearing fruit. The Christian is nourished and maturing through continued embrace of the foundational gospel news.

The third participle, βεβαιούμενοι, means “to increase in inner strength, with the implication of greater firmness of character or attitude—‘to receive more inner strength, to be strengthened in one’s heart.’”³⁵ The subject of this increasing strength

³¹William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 803. Also, see similar use of περιπατέω in Col 1:10, 2:7, 4:5.

³²O’Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 106-7. He points out the similarity that exists in walking in Christ in 2:6-7 and “walking in a manner worthy of the Lord” in 1:10ff. In 1:10, four participles follow the verb that more precisely define the desired walking.

³³Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 180.

³⁴Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 247.

³⁵Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 677.

follows: τῇ πίστει. Dunn translates this as “with reference to your faith” noting that “Once again the emphasis is on the message (traditions) which the Colossian Christians first received . . . and once again typically Pauline is the insistence that this faith (in Jesus as Christ and Lord, 2:5) is the sum and heart of their ongoing life and walk.”³⁶ The final participle, περισσεύοντες, meaning to abound, has its object ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ. Abound in thanksgiving. Dunn argues that this overflowing gratitude is the natural outflow of being rooted and growing in Christ.³⁷ Moo adds that “true gratitude” is an important offensive strategy against any forms of false teaching.³⁸

The main emphasis of these four participles is to be established and proven. The walk of the Christian life is an ongoing faith in Christ that endures and bears fruit. It parallels the imperatival clause of 1:23 in eliciting a continued embrace of the gospel.³⁹ The gospel is the news that God redeems wicked men through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. In the same way that a believer receives Jesus as Lord in regeneration and faith through the Spirit’s application of the gospel, so then believers are to continue to live and grow in the gospel. This good news justifies us before God and sanctifies us in this life, until it makes possible our entrance into God’s presence in glorification. God saves his people through the gospel as he justifies and sanctifies them by faith in Christ.

God’s People Are Sanctified through the Gospel in Community

Hebrews 10:24-25 demonstrates God’s intention to use his gathered Christian community to apply the gospel in community. Similar to Colossians, Hebrews is a Christo-centric book. Hebrews addresses the supremacy of Christ in the local church over

³⁶Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 142.

³⁷Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 143.

³⁸Moo, *Letters to Colossians and Philemon*, 183.

³⁹Melick notes the parallel in the passages’ repetition of synonyms. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 247

the old covenant. In chapter 10:19-25, the author gives three exhortations, which can be arranged under the headings of “faith” (10:19-22), “hope” (10:23), and “love” (10:24-25). The love that exists among the saints in the community of faith is a result of their faith in Christ Jesus and their hope of eternity with him.

A Cultivated Community

Peter O’Brien references the work of John A. L. Lee in developing an understanding of “κατανοῶμεν ἀλλήλους” in verse 24.⁴⁰ O’Brien adopts Lee’s meaning of κατανοέω in Hebrews 10, “to direct the mind towards and reflect on” and so he sees “the listeners are being urged to focus their minds and energies on the needs of their fellow members in order to spur, even provoke, them to love and good deeds.”⁴¹ Paul Ellingworth points out that Hebrews “emphasizes almost exclusively the responsibilities of Christians for one another, within the believing community.”⁴² As mutual care is commanded in 10:24, it comes by way of a word that usually carries a negative connotation (παροξυσμός). It occurs only twice in the New Testament, here and in Acts 15:39 describing the “sharp disagreement” that arose between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. Its semantic range includes “rousing to activity, stirring up, provoking”⁴³ The goal here would be to rouse to action in response, not as a result of disagreement as in Acts 15, but in response to the great redemptive news of Christ (10:19-21). Because Jesus

⁴⁰Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 369. While some have called into question the reliability of Peter T. O’Brien’s work, especially his commentary on Hebrews, I believe that the merit of his scholarship stands amidst allegations of plagiarism that can easily be explained as simple citation errors. John A. L. Lee, *A History of New Testament Lexicography*, Studies in Biblical Greek, ed. Peter Lang (Pieterlen, Switzerland: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2003), 18-25. Lee’s thesis is captured succinctly on pp. 20-21. Lee uses κατανοέω as an example in his argument against defining words in lexicography rather than substituting other words for explanation in gloss.

⁴¹O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 369-70.

⁴²Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1993), 526. He cites 6:10; 10:25; 12:15ff.

⁴³Arndt et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 780. Also: markers of a causative relation, with the implication of stimulating a change in motivation or attitude—‘to cause, encouragement.’ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 804.

has given us confidence through his blood, let us draw near, hold fast, and stir one another to love and good works. Ellingworth correctly argues for the positive meaning of *παροξυσμός* based on the context.⁴⁴ The community of Christ cultivates good work in one another's lives.

This stirring up in response to Christ's work has the object of love and good work (*ἀγάπης καὶ καλῶν ἔργων*). Jesus' opening the curtain to access to God through his flesh (verse 20) is meant to produce a people who bear the fruit of loving service who bear fruit in keeping with the gracious redemption they have experienced.⁴⁵ Cockerill writes,

It is most appropriate for those who draw near through Christ in anticipation of receiving God's promised reward to encourage one another in the life of love... Such mutual concern, in turn, creates and sustains a community conducive to perseverance in a hostile world. It is only right that those called to give full attention to Christ as all-sufficient Savior and example of perseverance (3:1; 12:2-3) should give such caring attention to God's people.⁴⁶

This mutual care for one another and cultivation of good works happens in response to the gospel of Christ. In redeeming a people, Jesus draws them together under the umbrella of the gospel to sharpen one another toward greater fruitfulness (Prov 27:17; Eph 4:3, 15-16).

A Gospel-Hoping Gathered Community

Christians are best provoked to love and good works as they interact and meet together. The word *ἐπισυναγωγὴν* indicates the type of meeting they were neglecting. It occurs in the New Testament only here and 2 Thessalonians 2:1 where it carries an eschatological connotation. Ellingworth points out a similar usage in 2 Maccabees 2:7

⁴⁴Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 527.

⁴⁵A similar pattern emerges in Col 1:3-5. Paul thanks God because of love for fellow saints that is present in the Colossian church and is issuing forth from faith in Christ and knowledge of hope laid up in heaven. So also in 1 Thess 1:3 he remembers their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." Faith and hope produce a labor of love (see 1 Tim 1:5).

⁴⁶Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 478.

referring to the final assembling of God’s people.⁴⁷ Some posit based on its ἐπι- prefix that it suggests a meeting that was separate from the synagogue worship.⁴⁸ Bruce states, “In that case, our author fears that the discontinuance of their special Christian meetings will mean their complete merging in the life of the larger Jewish community with the loss of their distinctive Christian faith and outlook.”⁴⁹ However, as Bruce points out, it can hardly be differentiated from συναγωγή.⁵⁰ This is not to say that the Christians are only participating in synagogue worship, as the word can simply mean “meeting.” Bruce concludes, “Our author may simply be urging his readers not to give up the general meeting of the church as they were doing.”⁵¹ O’Brien agrees that this refers to at the local gathering of Christians, but he adds, “However, both the noun and its cognate verb also designate the eschatological ingathering of Israel.”⁵² The passage carries a clear eschatological anticipation.⁵³ Koester likewise writes,

Since the context refers to the coming Day of the Lord and since the listeners understood that they already shared in the powers of the age to come (Heb. 6:5), they may have understood their gathering to anticipate the final ingathering of God’s people. The assembly is the earthly counterpart to the heavenly “congregation” (ekklesia) of God’s people (12:23; cf. 2:12).⁵⁴

⁴⁷Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 528.

⁴⁸Ellingworth notes William Manson tentatively suggesting that the ἐπι- prefix indicated a “Christian appendage to the Jewish synagogue” that was in danger of “virtually dissolving back into the general life of the Jewish community.” Ellingworth argues that perhaps the author of Hebrews avoided using συναγωγή to avoid its technical Jewish context (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 528).

⁴⁹F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 258.

⁵⁰Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 258.

⁵¹Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 258.

⁵²O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 370. O’Brien’s note for this sentence defines ἐπισυναγωγήν as ‘gathering together’ noting 2 Thess 2:1 and 2 Maccabees 2:7, as well as ἐπισυνάγω occurring in Matt 23:37; 24:31; Mark 13:27; Luke 13:34.

⁵³Ellingworth makes a similar connection in his comment on v. 25, “as Christians draw near to God in worship, so the day of God’s final judgment and deliverance draws near. Expectation of a near end is still alive in Hebrews (Loader 1981.57). Eschatological notes are typical of exhortations in Hebrews (3:6, 14; 6:8, 11; 10:23, 35–39; 12:26f.; 13:14), but are found in doctrinal passages also (1:2; 9:26, 28; 11:1, 40). The author may think of persecutions as signs of the end (vv. 32–34; cf. Mk. 13:12||; Zimmermann 1977.210)” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 529-30).

⁵⁴Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 446.

The essence of the meetings can be determined in part by the cause of their neglect of the gathering.

What would drive them to neglect these meetings? James Moffatt summarizes in three reasons why some might neglect meeting together: fear, fastidiousness, and conceit.⁵⁵ He sees the problem in their fear of persecution, disdain for others, perceived attainment of maturity beyond the need for instruction, or some combination of the three. O'Brien similarly sees contributing factors to their abandoning the gathering later in the letter such as persecution, indifference, or apathy.⁵⁶ John Owen in his commentary on the passage observed three reasons why they would abandon: (1) From fear of suffering, (2) Spiritual sloth, and (3) Unbelief working gradually towards the forsaking of all profession.⁵⁷ "Forsaking of church assemblies," Owen writes, "is usually an entrance into apostasy."⁵⁸ To neglect to meet together would be to abandon the means that God had given them for their progress in the faith and their perseverance in good works. Following the logic of verses 24-25, Kistemaker notes, "One of the first indications of a lack of love toward God and the neighbor is for a Christian to stay away from the worship services. He forsakes the communal obligations of attending these meetings and displays the symptoms of selfishness and self-centeredness."⁵⁹ Those gathered are charged in verse 25 with παρακαλέω (encourage, urge strongly) one another. To neglect the encouragement and spurring on of the gathering is a path to spiritual decline.

⁵⁵James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1924), 149. Moffatt identifies three reasons that keep individuals from worshipping with fellow Christians: fear, fastidiousness, and conceit. (1) They are fearful and ashamed to show their loyalty by being seen going to church. Fear criticism, loss of status. (2) They may dislike the common people, shy away from those not like themselves. (3) They may believe that they do not need the church, that they are intellectually beyond the standard of preaching at a particular church.

⁵⁶O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 371.

⁵⁷John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews with Preliminary Exercitations* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 6:522-23.

⁵⁸Owen, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 524.

⁵⁹William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 290. Kistemaker notes the exhortation echoed in the Didache (16:2), "But be frequently gathered together seeking the things which are profitable for your souls."

Their meeting together was a key stimulant to their spiritual maturity. It was rooted in their confidence in Christ on account of his blood (vv. 19, 22). When they met, it was to stir their fellow Christians to love and good works that they might “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (v. 23). To neglect this meeting was to invite spiritual decline and harm. In a similar way as Colossians 1:23, the prospect of failing to persevere to the end in Christ is held out as motivation to continue clinging to Christ through the gospel.

God sanctifies his people through the gospel in the midst of the gathered community of his people. This happens as his people gather together, in large or small numbers, with the purpose of fellowship in Christ, the stirring up mentioned in verse 24. John Owen captures the nature of these gatherings when he writes,

those assemblies were the life, the food, the nourishment of their souls; without which they could neither attend unto discipline of Christ, nor yield obedience unto his commands, nor make profession of his name as they ought, nor enjoy the benefit of evangelical institutions: whereas in a due observance of them consisted the trial of their faith in the sight of God and man.⁶⁰

These gatherings were not to be neglected because they held such great benefit for God’s people in their mutual upbuilding in Christ. Victor Pfitzner explains, “The heavenly High Priest has opened access to God’s presence. He has provided a cleansing from sin that allows all believers to function as priests as they boldly approach God in worship (10:19-22). Such access is based on a tenacious clinging to the confession of Christ as the confession of an objective hope.”⁶¹ In Christ, God’s people have access by faith. This faith they need stirred up by fellow saints who hold fast to the common head of the church. The growth that happens among God’s people as they live together in community comes by way of their holding fast to Christ in the gospel. God, through Christ, nourishes His people among and through God’s people gathered in community

⁶⁰Owen, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 521.

⁶¹Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 145.

(Eph 4:15-16; Col 2:19). God sanctifies his people through the gospel in the gathered community of faith. The gathering of God's people is instrumental in their continued embrace of Christ and spiritual maturity.

God's Sanctified People Spread the Gospel

First Peter 2:9-10 shows that God uses his people to take the gospel to unbelievers. God forms his people into a community that stirs up its members to love and good works with the goal of them being a clearer and more effective representation of gospel grace to the nations. As believers grow together into the image of Christ their Savior, they bend outward toward those who have not heard the gospel.

A People Formed for God's Service

First Peter 2:9 describes God's people who have been saved by the gospel and drawn into community as a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." There are strong communal language connections between 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Exodus 19:5-6 and Isaiah 43:30-21. In both OT passages, the emphasis lies on a people being chosen and possessed by God for his purposes.

Peter connects the people of God to Christ with his first description of them as a "γένος ἐκλεκτόν" ("chosen race"). In 2:4, 6 he described Christ as "ἐκλεκτόν ἔντιμον" ("chosen and precious") in the sight of God. Now, those in Christ are themselves a chosen race of God. These chosen people are a new community, a new γένος, made up of those who have been called by God and justified by grace through faith in Christ. These are people who have heard the gospel, believed the gospel, and now live by faith in Christ through the gospel. They are a community gathered by the common thread of Christ, chosen in him who is God's chosen and precious Son. This link between Christ and his people is strengthened by the context of Isaiah 43. Marshall notes,

In this part of Isaiah both the Lord's Servant and the people of Israel are chosen by him (compare Is 42:1; 45:4; 49:2), and Israel is spoken of as the Lord's Servant (Is 44:1). There is a sense in which God intended that Israel should be his Servant, but the people refused the role, and it fell to one person to take that role. Now the role

Israel refused in the past is reassigned to the church in union with Christ. Thus, to be a chosen nation is not only an indication of privilege but also a summons to service.⁶²

God gathers the church, as the new chosen servant people of God, for the purpose of serving Him.

Concerning the second description, Schreiner argues that believers function as priests in that they have the responsibility to mediate between God and the nations by means of proclaiming the gospel.⁶³ He goes on to note the individual and corporate aspects in priestly service: “The priesthood here is corporate in nature, and yet this does not rule out the truth that individuals serve priestly functions. Best seems to strike the right balance here: ‘Christians exercise priestly functions but always as members of a group who all exercise the same function.’”⁶⁴ The function they exercise is the proclamation of the gospel in the glories and excellencies of God. Beale and Carson see similar imagery in the “royal priesthood” description: “The priestly function of the whole people of God is to be holy and offer sacrifices to God, and only in that context to mediate between God and fallen humanity.”⁶⁵ They continue, “Christians are to offer themselves in loyal consecration to God, offer spiritual sacrifices that are ‘coextensive with the lives of the faithful,’ by which the church ‘brings the kingdom of God into being here below’”⁶⁶ The gathered people of God bring God to those far from God through their priestly service.

⁶²I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 74

⁶³Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2003), 115. He says further, “We should note the comparison and contrast here. Both Israel as a whole and the church of Jesus Christ are identified as a ‘royal priesthood.’ There is no suggestion that only a portion of Israel served as priests in Exodus 19.”

⁶⁴Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 115.

⁶⁵G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2007), 1031.

⁶⁶Beale and Carson, *New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1031.

Hillyer comments on the third description of God's people as a holy nation saying, "all believers are set apart for God (the sense of holy), but without geographic boundaries or without being limited to particular cultures, ages, or ethnic groups. This is a worldwide, spiritual people belonging to God."⁶⁷ He notes that this is language reminiscent of Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; Malachi 3:17. In the same way that Israel was released from the nation of Egypt to go out as God's own people, Christians are delivered through the gospel from their captivity to sin and other identities to be set apart for God's use among his people.⁶⁸ The final descriptor of "a people for God's own possession" is not mirrored in Exodus 19 or Isaiah 43 but its idea is communicated in both.⁶⁹ If God's people obey his commands and keep his covenant, he will continue with them as his own people. Schreiner draws out the similarity: "The privileges belonging to Israel now belong to the church of Jesus Christ. The church does not replace Israel, but it does fulfill the promises made to Israel; and all those, Jews and Gentiles, who belong to the true Israel are now part of the new people of God."⁷⁰ The emphasis in 1 Peter is consistently corporate, rather than individual.⁷¹ These people are formed for the use of God's purposes.

⁶⁷Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 68.

⁶⁸Beale and Carson, *New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1031.

⁶⁹Schreiner notes, "The term is used in Mal 3:17 of believers who respond to the Lord's rebuke and live righteously, and so in contrast to the wicked they constitute his possession, his special people. There is likely also an allusion to Isa 43:21. We noted above that the phrase 'chosen people' may be drawn from Isa 43:20. The verb 'I formed for myself' (periepoiēsamēn) in v. 21 is the verbal form of the noun 'possession' (NASB, peripoiēsis)" (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 115).

⁷⁰Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 115.

⁷¹Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 91. Davids writes, "Peter was more conscious of people's becoming part of a new corporate identity that is chosen by and that relates to God."

God's Purpose in Gathering Is Proclamation

Peter states that God's chosen people are to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you. The word ἐξαγγέλλω is used only here in the NT. It carries the idea of "publishing abroad."⁷² The people God purchases in Christ are possessed for the purpose spreading the news of his gracious reign. They proclaim the excellencies of God. Hillyer notes the connection with Isaiah 43:21 LXX: "Since that verse also goes on to refer to God's chosen people who are to tell forth his 'praises' (aretas)," which is the same word used as the object of the believers declaration in verse 9.⁷³ His excellencies are rooted in his gracious and effective call of his people out of the darkness of sin and into the marvelous light of life (2:10). The gospel message is the brightest display of these excellencies of God. Marshall writes, "Just as God called the people out of Egypt (Hos 11:1) and later out of Babylon, so now he has called people who were living in the darkness of ignorance and sin to be his people and live in the light of his revelation in Christ (compare Eph. 5:8). This light should fill God's people with wonder and praise."⁷⁴ God's people, saved by God's gospel into a community of faith, proclaim his excellencies as his own possession. The excellencies they have experienced through the gospel drive them into this thankful proclamation. Schreiner helpfully notes the other biblical allusions in the language of calling from darkness to light:

This is a description of their conversion and employs the language of Genesis 1, where God utters the word and light becomes a reality (Gen 1:3–5), pushing back the darkness. Paul used the same picture of conversion in 2 Cor 4:6, where God shines in the heart of his people to give them knowledge of his glory through Jesus Christ. Conversion is often depicted in the New Testament as a transfer from darkness to light (Acts 26:18; 2 Cor 4:6; Eph 5:8; 1 Thess 5:4, 5, 8).⁷⁵

⁷²Gerhard Kittel et al., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), s.v. "ἐξαγγέλλω."

⁷³Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 69.

⁷⁴Marshall, *1 Peter*, 76.

⁷⁵Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 116.

Marshall adds, “Just as God called the people out of Egypt (Hos 11:1) and later out of Babylon, so now he has called people who were living in the darkness of ignorance and sin to be his people and live in the light of his revelation in Christ (compare Eph 5:8). This light should fill God’s people with wonder and praise.”⁷⁶ The gospel grace of God in Christ is the grounds of God’s people’s proclamation. They proclaim his excellencies because they have experienced them so powerfully in the new birth through the gospel news of Christ.

God’s people declare his excellencies in both worship and evangelism. As they enjoy him, they proclaim him, even in suffering. As they do, the word of the Lord speeds abroad as they go, as Schreiner puts it, “spreading the good news of God’s saving wonders to all peoples.”⁷⁷ Grudem concludes, “God’s purpose in redeeming us is not simply our own enjoyment but that we might glorify him . . . seeking our own eternal well-being—right though it is—could never provide a truly satisfying goal for life. The answer to our search for ultimate meaning lies in ‘declaring the excellencies’ of God, for he alone is infinitely worthy of glory. Redemption is ultimately not man-centered but God-centered.”⁷⁸ Schreiner likewise adds, “As God formed Israel to praise him, now the church has been established to praise his wonders. God’s ultimate purpose in everything he does is designed to bring him praise (Isa 43:7).⁷⁹ God rescues a people to live in community and to be bent towards those who have not submitted to Christ’s reign. He does not save merely for our benefit; he saves that his people might be useful for his purposes of gospel declaration. God saves a people into community for mission through the gospel that they might spread the gospel. “The Church’s mission,” Goppelt says, “is

⁷⁶Marshall, *1 Peter*, 76.

⁷⁷Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 116.

⁷⁸Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 112.

⁷⁹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 115–16.

to proclaim God's 'great deeds' (Acts 2:11), Jesus' death and resurrection as the liberating alteration of the human creature and the world (1:18ff.): ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ — the exodus spoken of in Isaiah 43 in eschatological form. The Church's members proclaim this alteration because they have encountered it themselves."⁸⁰

Conclusion

The Scriptures have demonstrated that God sanctifies his people through the gospel in community for mission by moving through our key texts. The gospel justifies and sanctifies the people of God as he applies the gospel in the new birth and for ongoing spiritual maturity. This work of God through the gospel happens best in a gathered community as they stir one another to love and good works. This gospel work of God happens to equip his people to declare God's excellencies. Colossians 1:21-23 and 2:6-7 demonstrated the centrality of the gospel for the Christian's maturity. Hebrews 10:24-25 indicated the need for consistent gathering with believers around the gospel for maturity, and 1 Peter 2:9-10 exhibited one objective of God's people in the proclamation of the gospel. God's people are gathered around the gospel for maturity and for mission. As a small group structure for discipleship and mission is cultivated, these three-fold priorities of gospel, community must be central to the development.

⁸⁰Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 150.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED
TO THE PRACTICE OF DISCIPLESHIP AND
MISSION THROUGH A SMALL
GROUP STRUCTURE

Introduction

When Jesus promised to build his church following Peter's confession in Matthew 16:13-20 he connected the realities of heaven and earth in a visible way. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:19). The church is a universal yet unseen reality of Christ's people with local and visible representation on earth. John Hammett notes that of the 109 occurrences of ἐκκλησία in the New Testament "the overwhelming majority point to local churches, actual assemblies that gather and act."¹ These local bodies, Hammett argues, are described most fully in three images: the people of God, body of Christ, and temple of the Spirit.² The church is gathering of God's chosen people, united together under Jesus authority, and indwelt by the Spirit to live as God's instruments. God has been and is presently at work in the world redeeming a people for his own possession. He is reconciling them to himself through the finished work of Jesus Christ's righteous life, atoning death, and life-giving resurrection. He is forming them into local communities

¹John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 28.

²Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 31.

through the saving work of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit; local churches that reflect the universal, all-time, everywhere church. He is equipping and sending them to be his emissaries that take the message of Jesus Christ to those who have not yet heard and believed. This work of gathering God's people, maturing them, and sending them, chapter 2 argued, is happening in and through the local church. Building on the biblical and theological foundations of the truth that God sanctifies his people through the gospel in a community of the church for the sake of his mission, this chapter argues that the most effective arena for that work is in a small group of committed members. The discipleship and mission work of the local church is intensified and most effective when carried out by smaller units of the church in a committed unit.

As he outlines an evangelical theology of renewal, church history professor Richard Lovelace writes in his book *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* that a “major area of structural renewal needed within the local congregation is the formation and strengthening of nuclear subcommunities within the larger church community.”³ These nuclear subcommunities are thoroughly committed to the common commitment toward all members of the church, but their ability to care is intensified in the regular close proximity of commitment to a few saints within the life of the church. As the smaller units function well, the church at large is renewed.

The Broad and Narrow Commitment of the Church

The following proposition considers committed membership in the context of the local church on a macro and micro scale, or in other words, a broad and narrow commitment to the church.

³Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1979), 225-26.

The Broad Commitment of Church Life

The idea of “church” is somewhat commonplace, varying within the Christian tradition. Early Baptists in North America provide a helpful definition in *A Summary of Church Discipline* published in 1774 the Charleston Baptist Association and defined a church as “a company of saints incorporated by a special covenant into one distinct body, and meeting together in one place, for the enjoyment of fellowship with each other and with Christ their head, in all his institutions, to their mutual edification and the glory of God through the Spirit, 2 Cor. 8:5, Acts 2:1.”⁴ The essence of the church is committed saints who meet together to enjoy Christ and one another. Jonathan Leeman offers a similar brief definition: “A local church is a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name to officially affirm and oversee one another’s membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances.”⁵ The local church, as an outpost or embassy affirming membership in the universal church, is a gathered group of Christians transformed by the gospel and committing to Christ and one another.⁶ The church is the household of God (1 Tim 3:15) and the means he uses to display his glory to the created order (Eph 3:10) as he transforms his people through the gospel in a committed family as brothers and sisters now joined to the true head, Christ.

After outlining the church’s existence through covenantal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, theologian Gregg Allison describes the church as “covenantal, or gathered as members in (new) covenant relationship with God and in covenant relationship with each other.”⁷ The people that God justifies and adopts he makes a

⁴Mark Dever, ed., *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (Washington, DC: Nine Marks Ministries, 2001), 118.

⁵Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 52.

⁶Leeman, *Church Membership*, 27-33. Leeman argues that the local church is the embassy of heaven with the authority to affirm citizenship in that unseen reality among those on earth. Just as earthly embassies affirm citizenship of those who are foreigners in a different country, so the church affirms the heavenly, universal church citizenship of those who have not yet made it to their home country of God’s presence in the new creation.

⁷Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of

family together in the gathered church. Allison goes on to say, “Following the pattern of many churches, this covenantal relationship may be expressed by means of a church covenant, an agreement that binds those who affirm the covenant to life together in the church.”⁸ By means of Jesus’ Matthew 16 authority in the church, members are united together under Jesus’ authority expressed by the whole body. Leeman summarizes, “A local church, then, is its members. More specifically, a church is its members by virtue of the authority Jesus has given to believers who gather regularly in his name to constitute as a church.”⁹ In its gathered authority the church may express a covenant as a means of agreement among members for their expected actions toward one another.

Charles DeWeese, a historian and long-time director of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, defines a church covenant as “a series of written pledges based on the Bible which church members voluntarily make to God and to one another regarding their basic moral and spiritual commitments and the practice of their faith.”¹⁰ The commitment summarized and spelled out in a church covenant generally consists of fellowship, discipline, private and public worship, as well as pastoral and lay care.¹¹ In a covenant, members make a common pledge for life together as a family under Christ’s lordship. Covenants offer a summary of the Bible’s teaching on life together as a church that is short enough to read quickly and written in approachable language. As a small reflection of the universal church the local assembly expresses the expectations of life in the church by means of a covenant.

Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 123. Allison argues, “No biblical imperative or example can be marshaled in support of this community aspect of the covenantal nature of the church” and that “appeals to ancient tradition in support of church covenants are not strong.” He sees their rise of popularity beginning at the time of the Reformation and continuing with the rise of Baptists in the early part of the seventeenth century (124-26).

⁸Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 124.

⁹Jonathan Leeman, “A Congregational Approach to Unity, Holiness, and Apostolicity,” in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 359.

¹⁰Charles W. Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), viii.

¹¹Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, 30.

The promise of a church covenant creates a community bond among Christ's people; a bond that should not be taken lightly. In their book *Compelling Community* Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop describe a community that "runs deep" with at least four actions in view summarized from the New Testament: Christians in the church will love one another deeply and sacrificially, assemble regularly with one another, encourage one another, and guard one another.¹² Each of these "one-another" commitments in community goes on at the macro level of church. However, each responsibility can be carried out more effectively at the micro level of a committed gathering that maximizes opportunities for interaction and shared life space. If there are 200 committed saints gathered for worship on Sunday morning, arriving an hour early and leaving an hour after the service would not give a person enough time to make a meaningful effort at encouraging all 199 others. However, if among those 200 there are 15-20 saints that members are committed to intentionally loving, encouraging, and guarding, the work becomes more manageable. In a large gathering it is nearly impossible to exercise the care of commitment to each person gathered, but as C. J. Mahaney points out, in a small group members can "both give and receive specific, personal care. No one need be overlooked or neglected."¹³ The goal of committing to a micro subsection of the whole is that the expressions of covenant commitment in the church will be richly fulfilled.

This small group ministry commitment is a product of ecclesiology. If members pledge to a common covenant, then exercising covenant responsibilities is more than a suggested addition to our busy week. It is an imperative. Therefore, placing committed members into manageable sized groups allows them to more fully express the promises made in church membership.

¹²Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *Compelling Community: Where God's Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 56-57.

¹³C. J. Mahaney, ed., *Why Small Groups? Together Toward Maturity* (Gaithersburg, MD: Sovereign Grace Ministries, 1996), 11.

The house church: A commitment to all made among a few. While it is different from our particular church context and philosophy, some have argued for a broad commitment in membership that is intentionally restricted to a few participants in order to maintain a meaningful commitment to one another.

One proponent of house churches, professor and pastor J. D. Payne, defines the church as a new community of citizens under the reign of Jesus who show “1) love for the King, 2) love for others in the kingdom, and 3) love for those outside the kingdom.”¹⁴ The church is not required a certain size or status but rather is organized among a people born again through Christ, loving one another, and sharing the gospel.¹⁵ Payne defines house churches positively in contrast with more traditional church structures when he describes them as “more organic, less institutional . . . more simple, less structure . . . more participatory worship, less passivity . . . more community, less acquaintances.”¹⁶

Jim Elliff, an elder at Christ Fellowship of Kansas City describes their body as “one church with multiple congregations meeting in homes, rather than a single, unaffiliated, group.”¹⁷ Elliff describes a typical Sunday in the life of their church consisting of an afternoon meeting with open session, which is a time of sharing insight into Christ, matters of life, and evangelistic opportunities. This open session also includes a serious Bible exposition usually given by an elder generally delivered sitting down in an informal format. Following this time they take the Lord’s Supper together and share a meal. During the week the elders mentor every man in the church and gain insight into every family in the body and ways to encourage them. Elliff admits this is “one model to

¹⁴J. D. Payne, *Missional House Churches* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2008), 27.

¹⁵Payne also cites the biblical metaphors for the church as a family (Matt 12:46-50; Rom 12:10), a body (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:25), a priesthood (1Pet 2:5, 9), a fellowship (1 John 1:7, 1 Pet 2:17; Acts 4:32-35), a sanctuary or temple (1 Cor 3:16), a building (Eph 2:21), a bride (Rev 21:2,9), branches (John 15:1-8), sheep (John 10:1-18), and finally salt and light (Matt 5:13-17). Payne, *Missional House Churches*, 29-35.

¹⁶Payne, *Missional House Churches*, 38-42.

¹⁷Jim Elliff, “The House Church Way of Life,” accessed January 31, 2017, <http://www.ccwtoday.org/article/the-house-church-way-of-life/>.

consider among many others,” but he gives it his highest recommendation as he concludes, “I’ve never been in a church so well-ordered. Every member is accounted for every day. It is doctrinally sound and unified. Evangelism is seen at every turn. Faith and prayer are exercised and needs are being met.”¹⁸

There is much to be praised in the house church model as advocated by Payne, Elliff and others. In their charitable presentation they admit that it is not the model of church body life, but rather a model that can be effective. They encourage a similar ecclesiological structure that promotes discipline, preaching of the word, and the ordinances in house congregations. Elliff and Payne both continue to embrace and serve the traditional church model that gathers in a building with a larger group.¹⁹ Though they see benefits and might argue pragmatically for the house church model of limiting the size of gatherings to those that can be known and served personally, they do not dismiss the larger church model when other measures are in place for shepherding and discipleship. Elliff notes on his ministry website, “In my view, all roads lead first to Christ and to His church. Our ministry is all about the local church. The house church is one model to consider among many others. Most of our articles are adaptable by any kind of church, but I still want leaders everywhere to consider biblical models of church life.”²⁰

¹⁸J. D. Payne in *Missional House Churches* (14-15) clarifies the difference between a “house church” and a “cell church” being that a house church does not have a governing authority over it. “It considers itself fully autonomous . . . no overarching authoritative body or board dictates to the local congregation what the church can and cannot do.” A cell church on the other hand considers the sum of the parts to equal the whole, so many cell groups or home groups will be semi-autonomous, relying on one another to comprise the church. “Each cell makes its own decisions . . . but they do so in light of all the other cells” (14). Based on Elliff’s description of Christ Fellowship’s governance by elders who each lead a home church, it would be best classified a cell church comprised of many groups.

¹⁹J.D. Payne is the pastor for church multiplication with The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, which is large congregation that gathers weekly in a sizeable facility.

²⁰Jim Elliff, *The House Church Way of Life*, accessed January 31, 2017, <http://www.cwtoday.org/article/the-house-church-way-of-life/>

The Narrow Commitment of Small Groups

A small group unit takes the broad commitment made to every member of the church body and narrows the focus of intentional, ongoing exercise of covenant responsibilities to a few. Meaningful and regular covenantal commitment is difficult to thoroughly fulfill on a large scale. It is made more feasible if reduced to a numerically smaller group. The church covenant produced by John Newton Brown in New Hampshire in the first half of the nineteenth century that became a standard in Baptist church life commits the assembly, among other things, to “walk together in Christian love...to watch over one another with brotherly love, to remember each other in prayer, to aid each other in sickness and distress.”²¹ This walk together with the fellow saints is difficult if the number of saints swells to a number beyond what someone can meaningfully interact with on a regular basis. C. J. Mahaney writes from his experience as a local church pastor when he says, “Genuine fellowship isn’t practical in a crowd of 200 or 2,000. That’s why I feel so strongly that churches must create small groups where Christians can develop intimate relationships, where they can ‘know and be known.’”²² Committed small groups offer a place for meaningful exercise of our functions as the body of Christ. The intimately connected group of people can intensify God’s work through his church in the lives of those covenanted together.

Broad Care for All Committed

Small groups do not replace the broader commitment. Rather, they deepen connections amongst a few within the whole while not negating the responsibility to all. A covenantal commitment in the local church helps members make a pledge to every other member without exception. The benefits of such a pledge, as outlined by Gregg Allison in his book *Sojourners and Strangers*, summarizing Charles Deweese, are the

²¹Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, 161-62.

²²Mahaney, *Why Small Groups?*, 3.

creation of a sense of unity and shared responsibility among members.²³ Every member is involved in a church's commitment. While the narrowed focus of intensive commitment in small groups aids the exercise of covenant commitment, it does not diminish the exercise of covenant responsibilities due those outside of the small group. Loving one another with intentional care in the life of the church is a lifestyle that extends to each fellow member.

Narrow Care for All Committed

Organizing the church into small group units is not a biblical imperative. There is no clear New Testament description of a focused group within the larger church exercising commitment for maturity and mission. The use of small groups is a means to an end. The intended end is God's glory spreading through his people as they know him, grow in Christ-likeness, and spread the fragrance of Christ among those who do not know him. Organizing the church into small group units is an effective means to create a committed and engaged community in hope of reaching the agreed upon ends of the larger church.²⁴

Small group commitment assures members that others in the broad commitment of every member are receiving care, discipleship, and admonition. Members can know this is true even if we are not principally involved in offering it. For instance, if church member Doug has a significant relationship with four other male church members not in his small group unit, he can be assured these brothers are being stirred to faith and love even if he is not able to meet with them regularly. Exercising the broad commitment to every member is easier when a culture of narrow commitments in small groups assures

²³Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 127.

²⁴Julie Gorman writes, "There is a difference between small groups and community . . . Small groups may become a means to an end. They can provide for the experience of community . . . Community takes time, commonality of commitment, and an openness to the formation of the Spirit. Groups may or may not become wombs for this birth of community among members." Julie Gorman, *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 23-24.

each that avenues for spiritual care are readily available to all.

In a well-organized small group structure the commitments of church members towards one another can be carried out with consistency and intimacy in regular meetings for spiritual benefit. All of the members receive better care when a few members take particular responsibility for one another. Brad House argues his book *Community* that Christians should view our commitment to one another in community as a lifestyle rather than an event. “When we see community as a series of events,” he writes, “we hold on to our individuality and see community in terms of what it offers us.”²⁵ Committing to a small group is a commitment to covenant care, instruction, correction, love, and support that are due to all members poured out intensely to a few members through the week. It is not a commitment to one meeting a week; it is an avenue to enjoy the privilege of living together as the family of God on mission.

Small Groups Position Members to Deepen Understanding and Application of the Gospel

The chief commitment of the church is to the gospel of Christ. In the previous chapter Colossians 1:21-23 and 2:6-7 were the dominant passages that established the truth that God matures his covenant people through the gospel. In the narrow commitment of a small group, members are positioned to understand and apply the gospel for Christian maturity in superior ways than they could solely in a broad commitment to a larger church body.

The Gospel for the Church

The church is a people formed by the gospel. As God justifies and adopts rebels he places them around a new family table with fellow redeemed brothers and sisters. Tim Lane and Paul Tripp remind readers that in the gospel, “Adoption goes

²⁵Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 96.

beyond an individual blessing. You have been adopted into a new family. The blessing of adoption is both individual and corporate.”²⁶ This adoption by God through the gospel is the beginning of life together in church. As a family, the church shares the same gospel DNA and it displays the gospel in the way that it continues to live together as a family on the sufficiency of Christ.

There is more to the gospel’s power in the life of the church than just it’s origin. The content of the church’s life together is the gospel. Gregg Allison puts it bluntly: “Jesus is the central – better, sole – reason for Christian covenantal community.”²⁷ Jesus is the centerpiece of the gathered church. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis write about the ongoing place of the gospel in the church in their book *Total Church*, “The gospel word and the gospel community are closely connected. The word creates and nourishes the community, while the community proclaims and embodies the word.”²⁸ Formed by the gospel, the church continues to live by the gospel and proclaim the gospel. The gospel is the ongoing sustenance of the church’s life together.

Groups Committed to the Gospel

If the church is centered on the gospel then small group units in the local church should be centered on the gospel, not other commonalities people might share. Groups for young moms, divorcees, widows, or men who hunt can be tools for fellowship and evangelism, but they should not be the primary vehicles for exercising covenant commitment with fellow saints. Dever and Dunlop note that community built around natural bonds has a downside in that it is not otherworldly and does not create remarkable

²⁶Tim Lane and Paul Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2006), 80-81.

²⁷Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 131.

²⁸Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 55.

unity to outsiders.²⁹ “We should aspire,” they continue, “for many relationships that exist only because of the gospel.”³⁰ Our commitment to one another in a small group is not based on a shared affinity or season of life, but on our commitment to Christ and to his church made in church membership. According to New Testament scholar D. A. Carson, “the church itself is not made up of natural ‘friends.’ It is made up of natural enemies.”³¹ The gospel news of Jesus’ perfect life, atoning death, and life giving resurrection are central to every relationship in the church. The unity the church enjoys is gospel wrought unity. Every dividing wall is taken down in the gospel and those who would not naturally love one another are freed to express sacrificial love in and through Christ.

Gospel Renewal

The church’s commitment to the gospel is much broader than a commitment to evangelism. Christian formation professor James Wilhoit, in his book *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, describes a truncated view of the gospel as “pre-discipleship,” meaning the gospel is seen as “merely the door by which we enter Christianity.”³² Wilhoit helpfully summarizes a pre-discipleship gospel based on a sermon: “God saved me (gospel); now I need to make myself holy (discipleship).”³³ The gospel, however, is that by which a Christian is both justified and renewed, and so it must be more than the message proclaimed to those far from Christ. It is a message declared to

²⁹Dever and Dunlop, *Compelling Community*, 22.

³⁰Dever and Dunlop, *Compelling Community*, 22.

³¹D. A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 61. Carson goes on to say, “What binds us together is not a common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of the sort. Christians come together, not because they form a natural collocation, but because they have all been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance. In the light of this common allegiance, in the light of the fact that they have all been loved by Jesus himself, they commit themselves to doing what he says – and he commands them to love one another. In this light, they are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus’ sake.”

³²James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 26.

³³Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 26.

those in Christ as well.³⁴

In his book *Center Church* Tim Keller contends that Christians need the gospel as he argues that the predominant need of every person is gospel renewal.³⁵ We need to be moved from our standard operating system of religion that finds acceptance through obedience, to the operating system of the gospel that produces obedience because God accepts sinners by free grace through Christ.³⁶ Our heart's natural inclination to idols, whether inside or outside, must be replaced by rest in Christ's finished work to gain good standing with God. Keller's assertion echoes in the doctrinal structure of the Pauline New Testament epistles that while written to existing believers in Jesus, they begin with thorough explanations of the gospel before moving to address issues of application in the Christian life.³⁷

In *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, Richard Lovelace argues for three components for ongoing gospel renewal: (1) awareness of God's holiness, (2) the depth and depravity of sin, and (3) the sufficiency of the atoning work of Jesus to bring believers to God forever.³⁸ This embrace of the gospel, he argues, should happen "not just at the outset of their Christian lives but in every succeeding day."³⁹ Similarly, James Wilhoit writes,

³⁴Wilhoit uses the example of the bridge method of sharing the gospel in which we make clear that nothing we do can earn access to God, but the cross of Christ has gained us forgiveness to make God accessible by faith, acting as a bridge from the sinner to a holy God. The shortcoming, according to Wilhoit, is that this method communicates the gospel as an entry point to cross the chasm caused by sin and insinuates that the Christian life is a continuing to run after God without the gospel in view. "Learning that the cross is big enough is a lifelong vocation. From personal brokenness and reflection I have come to see that the gospel is not simply the door of faith: it must also be a compass I daily use to orient my life and a salve I apply for the healing of my soul. It is in returning again and again to the cross that we receive the grace that transforms us." Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 29.

³⁵Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 54-88.

³⁶Keller, *Center Church*, 63.

³⁷Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder note, "At the macro-level, Paul's letters tend to proceed from new life to new living, as per their theological and ethical sections (so, e.g., Romans 1-11; 12-16; Galatians 1-4; 5-6; Ephesians 1-3; 4-6)." Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder, *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 221.

³⁸Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 102.

³⁹Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 102.

“The gospel must permeate any program of Christian spiritual formation. Returning to the cross in awareness of our sin, rebellion, and brokenness is the bedrock of spiritual formation.”⁴⁰ Christians are renewed by the gospel when they continue to experience it’s power as they see more of God, more of their sin, and more beauty and grace in Christ’s work to reconcile them to God.

In order to grow in our awareness of God, our sin, and the gospel everyday, Christians need a people who live with them in close proximity. Ray Ortlund notes the transforming work of Christ in changing his people and shaping their gospel community of the church when he writes, “gospel doctrine cracks our hearts open to receive something from beyond this world. We see how massive God’s love really is, and so we give up our aloofness and come together to care for one another in real ways, even as God wonderfully cares for us.”⁴¹ Seeing this great love from God in the gospel believers are brought together to be those able to speak of this great love with one another and display it in life together.

Keller warns, “Even the one operating out of the gospel will naturally drift into religion unless constantly challenged and renewed.”⁴² Christians need the gospel to renew their minds and keep them holding fast in faithfulness to God. Christians need the gospel and they need to hear the gospel from their fellow saints. They need help applying it to hard-to-reach areas of life. They need help seeing the log in their eyes, and they need fellow Christians close enough to see who they really are and not shirk back from speaking the truth in love.

Committed small groups position believers for gospel renewal as they give them opportunity to transparently live closely with fellow believers who can help identify

⁴⁰Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 27.

⁴¹Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 37.

⁴²Keller, *Center Church*, 63.

the things necessary for gospel renewal: thoroughness of our depravity, the holiness of God, and the welcome of the gospel to return to God. Those who commit to remind of the gospel and identify sin are God's tools to renew his people with the gospel. Again, this commitment is centered on the good news of the gospel. Lovelace writes,

Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives. Many have so light an apprehension of God's holiness and of the extent and guilt of their sin that consciously they see little need for justification, although their lives are deeply guilt-ridden and insecure. Many others have a theoretical commitment to this doctrine, but in their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for justification, in the Augustinian manner, drawing their assurance of acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance or the relative infrequency of their conscious, willful disobedience.⁴³

Christ and his atoning work have center place in our gathered life together because his people need ongoing, regular reminders that they live by grace alone through faith alone.

Inferior Commitments

The extensive commitment of life together in the local church runs counter cultural to some of the present day theory dominating the small group ministry landscape. In many cases, small groups are outreach gatherings, intended as a front porch for the church, or community groups whose purpose is to give people an expression of fellowship.⁴⁴ The contention is that if the church gives someone an offering that they are interested in, they will rearrange their schedule and commit to come to meetings. The goal in a small group structure such as advocated here, however, is different in that it is the creation of a narrow focus for the broad covenant commitments made to the local church. So then as the church is formed by and for the gospel, so the small group unit is

⁴³Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 101.

⁴⁴David Stark and Betty Veldman Wieland identify six organizing centers for small groups: relationship-building, felt needs, affinity, passions, spiritual hunger, and service-oriented tasks. David Stark and Betty Veldman Wieland, *Growing People through Small Groups* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), 31-37. Julie Gorman suggests that "the shared purpose that group members have usually determines the kind of groups being formed" (*Community That Is Christian*, 110). She then suggests friendship, evangelism, nurture, study, support, recovery, equipping, prayer, mission/project, worship as such purposes for gathering a group and singles, seniors, intergenerational interaction and grief as further reasons.

initiated in the same way and for the same purpose.

Affinity based groups are inferior to gospel-centered groups in effectiveness at maturing members and displaying the power of the gospel in relationships. Connections fostered through shared interest or life stage do not provoke maturity in the same way that connection through the gospel. Gatherings based on other commonalities may be tools for evangelism, but they do not help the church express intentional commitment to one another. Further, they diminish the display of the gospel's transforming power in relationship among those who share no commonalities except a common salvation in Christ. Trevor Joy and Spencer Shelton put it this way in their book *The People of God*, "The only thing strong enough to build and sustain Christian community is the gospel and the refuge found therein. Demographics, money, location, shared interests, curriculum, or good causes will not create the deep, true community for which God designed us."⁴⁵ The connection that shared gospel commitment fosters enables participants to celebrate the reconciling work of Christ in demonstrable ways that are absent where connections are more naturally explainable.⁴⁶

In *Compelling Community* Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop connect the argument of Ephesians 2 in the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile as one new body in Christ with that of the Ephesians 3 where this new body is the means God uses to display his glory to rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.⁴⁷ The degree of separation that

⁴⁵Trevor Joy and Spence Shelton, *The People of God: Empowering the Church to Make Disciples* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 56.

⁴⁶James Samra in *The Gift of Church* notes three reasons the local church is unique in displaying unity in diversity: "First, in order for Christ to redeem our diversity (so that it can accomplish what God originally designed it to reveal), the members of the group in which we are placed cannot have anything else in common except Christ. God designed the church so that the only criterion for participation is faith in Christ." Secondly, "God designed the church so that we could have unity with other Christians regardless of time and geography Wherever the gospel has gone, the church has followed." The third reason the church is better suited for bringing unity in diversity is that it "allows for differing ways of viewing God and his truth Because local churches are united with other churches through time and space and because local churches are themselves filled with those with different gifts, experiences, and backgrounds, the local church is best equipped to both present a more complete picture of God and his truth as well as to navigate through the dangers of theological error." James Samra, *The Gift of Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 52-55.

⁴⁷Dever and Dunlop, *Compelling Community*, 70-73.

exists between Jew and Gentile before Christ makes the unity within the body noticeable to the angelic beings, and to mere mortals below. “As people with little in common in the world’s eyes love each other as if they are closer than family, all heaven looks on with wonder at what the gospel has created . . . our strength – our ability to showcase the supernatural gospel power – is our diversity.”⁴⁸ A group of otherwise divided people who are united around Christ in the church is a clear Christ’s worth and power.

Small group units of committed members are arguably the best means for displaying this redemptive and unifying power in the local church. This is more than a small group agreeing to weekly meetings, it is agreeing to daily life together. The small group is the limited number of people for whom members exercise the constant care committed to in our covenant commitment to the church. Gathering for a meeting is a part of that commitment, but it is so much more. Small groups allow members to exercise their commitment to the church members in a narrow focus for increased effectiveness in care and nurture.

**Small Groups Position Members to Mature
through the Enduring Commitment with
Fellow Saints**

The nature of our commitment around the gospel is reflective of the nature of the gospel itself. As members pledge to stir one another to love and good deeds and to exhort one another daily, they express a promise to the local church not to be exercised without care. Life together as a church should be committed for lasting care because in the gospel Christians experience the lasting care of God through Christ. The goal of God’s saving his people is not just a singular experience of joy, but also a life and an eternity of joy in him. And so as members pledge to experience maturity in Christ and life together with fellow saints in the local church, they make a long-term commitment. Maturity is gained in the long run and requires lasting influence to speak the truth in love

⁴⁸Dever and Dunlop, *Compelling Community*, 72-73.

to fellow saints.

The Close Proximity of a Small Group

A small group narrows the focus of our best energy in the church life to stir the fellow members to understand and apply the gospel even as they endeavor to display it as missionaries. God uses nearness and intimacy with fellow saints to conform his people into the image of Jesus in our understanding and application of the gospel. In *The Gift of Church* James Samra likens the local church to the Army unit that exists to shape soldiers in small pockets of community for the Army's larger purpose. "The unit is the community where the army brings unity out of the diversity of its recruits."⁴⁹ This is the same idea as the local church. A Christian is immediately a member of the universal church, but the growth and maturity into the image of Christ comes through local body of believers. "In order to bring unity out of this diversity," Samra writes, "God not only has to . . . enroll them in the universal church, he has to place them together in a local group so that they can learn to love one another and find their identity in Christ alone."⁵⁰ The local church is where those brought into the universal church are made into the likeness of the church's Lord and Savior.

Our conformity to Christ in the Christian life is a progressive and gradual increase. Robert Cheong writes in *God Redeeming His Bride*, "Christ knows our tendency towards autonomy, so He calls to a radical life of community where we encourage and challenge one another to live out the gospel as a scattered and gathered body."⁵¹ We need people committed for the long haul. There are seasons of fruitful labor and seasons of little harvest. Yet the most effective means of growth is among a people who are committed to spiritual care for more than a passing season. The church, Ray

⁴⁹Samra, *The Gift of Church*, 51.

⁵⁰Samra, *The Gift of Church*, 52.

⁵¹Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 32.

Ortlund argues, is more than a collection of people who decide to meet in the same place once a week.⁵² One might run into a fellow Christian multiple times in one month, but they do not exercise care, oversight, or responsibility for that person. “It is only in a church that we are members of Christ and of one another, moving forward together like a well-coordinated body (1 Cor 12:12-27). It is together that we suffer and thrive . . . your church is ground zero for the kind of community Christ is creating in the world today for the display of his glory.”⁵³

Following the instruction given to the Hebrews, Christians “take care” to watch their hearts as they “exhort one another every day” to see that each one is able to “hold our original confidence to the end” (Heb 3:12-14). They best “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” as they meet with fellow saints with thoughtful ways to “stir one another to love and good works” (Heb 10:24-25). In *Total Church* Steve Timmis and Tim Chester pinpoint the need in for exhortation in Hebrews 3 when they write, “Our hearts are never far from sin, unbelief, hardening, and deception. To persevere we need people who will encourage us, and we need them to encourage us daily. The living, active word of God does its heart-softening work through gospel people reminding one another daily of gospel grace.”⁵⁴ The church, at the broad and narrow level, serves in the avenue of family life to instruct, care, and rebuke the fellow family members. The known community becomes the arena for care, nurture and meaningful exhortation. Chester and Timmis explain this dynamic in their book *Total Church* arguing that most pastoral care happens in ordinary life – over meals, on shopping trips, watching one another’s children, play dates, and the like. “This preventative care often averts pastoral crises or helps people cope when they face difficult circumstances. But for these to be occasions of pastoral care we need to be intentional about encouraging one

⁵²Ortlund, *The Gospel*, 40-41.

⁵³Ortlund, *The Gospel*, 40.

⁵⁴Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 150.

another and exhorting one another with the gospel.”⁵⁵ The same is true of evangelism, as Christians invite people into the already established rhythms of normal life together in Christ. This holistic approach to life together in evangelism, maturity, and mission emerges from a church that is committed to Christ and one another in tangible, experiential ways.

Agreeing on the Gospel

The content of our exhortation is the gospel, a message of grace in Christ that the church commitment has expressed in covenant and doctrinal statement. As members align themselves with a local church they align themselves with the statement of faith by covenant commitment to the church in which they agree on the content of the gospel. The gospel is the centerpiece of the church; therefore it is the spoken center of member’s encouragement and instruction. Chester and Timmis describe the church as “the community formed by the gospel for the gospel” and it is in that community in which God dwells by his Spirit.⁵⁶ In covenant commitment members agree to what they need to hear and be reminded of in Christ’s atoning work. This agreement gives them a common language and defensible understanding of the content of the gospel they speak to one another.

An Enduring Commitment to One Another around the Gospel

As the church organizes around the gospel it commits to each member of the body in lasting terms. Intimate care does not happen from a distance and it rarely happens quickly. A consumer mentality of commitment has hindered spiritual maturity in the local church. Those who approach the choice of church and how often they will participate in body life based strictly on the aesthetic or perceived benefit from the

⁵⁵Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 137.

⁵⁶Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 29.

worship experience, music, or preaching often miss out on the maturity that comes from patient endurance with one particular body. In the way of a consumer, when a problem arises they move to a church that better fits their needs; in many cases losing the opportunity for spiritual maturity that results from committing in long-suffering and forgiveness. Among those who commit to long-term membership in the local church, however, come lasting rewards of growth in grace as they continue to speak truth in love with fellow saints as initiator and beneficiary.

Few people move quickly into healthy relationships with initial transparency and openness. Instead, the right to speak and the opportunity to instruct and care are earned as trustworthiness and grace are demonstrated. The long-term commitment of care in the small group setting offer time to know and be known so that struggles and temptations can be seen and shared. The seasoned fellowship among saints is sweeter with age. As she argues that community among God’s people means relatedness, Julie Gorman writes, “To relate, one must know, and to know one must work at being open to trust. Relatedness has a price tag that not only includes time but also energy and concern.”⁵⁷ The time that building trust and relatedness requires stands as a foreign concept in our “instant-minded culture” and can quickly frustrate those looking for a quick fix.⁵⁸ Yet the slow-cooker approach of relatedness in biblical maturity is a surer path. This requires a departure from individualism and embrace of the collective discipleship of the church committed to Christ and one another. James Wilhoit highlights the need for this togetherness in the life of the church as he writes, “Our message needs to have far more emphasis on the fact that we are all in this together. We all suffer from the same deadly disease of sin, and we are all in the same treatment facility.”⁵⁹

As the stories of many people merge and form a new collective story each is

⁵⁷Gorman, *Community that is Christian*, 98.

⁵⁸Gorman, *Community that is Christian*, 99.

⁵⁹Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 88.

shaped and helped by the others inside the whole. The community lives together, with increasing knowledge of one another and growing effectiveness in how they help. Knowing more and more that they can be fully known and loved, they embrace each other in the longevity that the gospel creates. They can live inside the commitment of a gracious community with the hope of the gospel “that we don’t have to be a perfect community since Jesus was perfect for us.”⁶⁰ Members live out the gospel when they live in the acceptance of God through Christ and receive others in the same grace. “You don’t have to pretend to be perfect because all of us are imperfect people clinging to a perfect Christ, being perfected by the Spirit!”⁶¹

Speaking the Gospel to a Known People

Pastoral care in the committed small group gains the benefit of speaking an agreed upon gospel, through doctrinal and covenantal agreement, to a people they know intimately. Life together over the long haul gives the advantage of speaking to the specific heart struggles in an enduring manner. The church, according to Sinclair Ferguson, is “a fellowship of pastoral care.”⁶² Every member exhorts for the common good (1 Cor 12:7). When they are committed to and know those they speak the gospel to, they are able to speak with greater clarity, precision, and empathy as they provoke them to repentance and faith. According to Watson, churches must work “to create a safe environment for [authentic community] to happen which will require a love in hearing the true stories of others.”⁶³ This culture of grace shaped by forgiveness and mercy will provoke transparency in others. Knowing one another in an atmosphere of gracious

⁶⁰Jonathan K. Dodson and Brad Watson, *Called Together: A Guide to Forming Missional Communities* (Austin, TX: GCD Books, 2014), 41.

⁶¹Brad Watson, *Sent Together: How the Gospel Sends Leaders to Start Missional Communities* (Austin, TX: GCD Books, 2015), locs. 873-74, Kindle.

⁶²Sinclair Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 72.

⁶³Watson, *Sent Together*, locs. 892-93.

reception opens up pathways for maturity and transparency for change in community. In their book *How People Change* Tim Lane and Paul Tripp argue that the best path to maturity and the best way to encourage maturity in other Christians is to be involved with them in the midst of the mess of ordinary life. “The more we understand our own hearts, the more we see that it takes a work of God’s grace to transform self-absorbed individuals into a community of love. Being in redemptive relationships shows us our need for change and helps bring it about!”⁶⁴ When they know and love one another well, they open themselves up for gospel renewal in community in ways that are impossible apart from intimate relationships.

Speaking the Gospel Regularly

The pattern of life together in a small group ministry in the local church offers opportunity for regular gospel exhortation. Pivotal to the work of exhortation is that the main diet of our time together is not exhortation. While the biblical mandates to “encourage one another” and “rebuke” or “correct” one another (Gal 6:1-2; Col 3:13-16; 1 Thess 4:9, 5:11; Heb 10:24-25; 1 Pet 3:8) remains unspecified with regard to how to balance these aspects, C. J. Mahaney offers pastoral wisdom when he suggests a ratio five to ten words of affirmation for every one word of correction.⁶⁵ If our only ministry to a person is that of rebuke, it will be a short-lived relationship. In his book *You Can Change* Tim Chester, “Part of our problem is that we don’t rebuke one another day by day. So when we do, it creates or exacerbates a sense of crisis. Rebuke becomes confrontation.”⁶⁶ In other words, regular correction in a culture shaped by the gospel helps members pursue repentance before things get out of hand. Christians need

⁶⁴Lane and Tripp. *How People Change*, 83.

⁶⁵Cited by Sam Crabtree from personal correspondence. Sam Crabtree, *Practicing Affirmation: God-Centered Praise of Those Who Are Not God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), locs. 621-22, Kindle.

⁶⁶Tim Chester, *You Can Change: God’s Transforming Power for Our Sinful Behavior and Negative Emotions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 160.

committed people close enough to be regularly asking about their pursuit of holiness. Tim Lane and Paul Tripp argue in their book *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* that health and maturity in relationships in the church are not measured by an absence of sin, but by how that sin is handled.⁶⁷ As those still in need of final redemption the need for correction will never go away, therefore regular correction should be a part of the everyday life together.

Allowing the gospel to create a culture of grace among the members of a committed small group fosters opportunity for transparency and openness. This is a ripe culture for growth in godliness as they see and expose our sin and run in repentance and faith to Christ together. Noting that a culture shaped by the gospel requires an abundance of the gospel spoken, safety to be honest and accepted, and time to hear and believe these truths, Ray Ortlund concludes, “people will see him in us as we build our churches into gospel cultures with the resources of gospel doctrine, taking no shortcuts.”⁶⁸ A culture shaped by the gospel is hard work. It requires the labor of speaking the gospel regularly and repeatedly in application within the committed body. However, as members labor, they gain the joy of knowing and being known, found in Christ among a committed family, and like a fine wine, membership gets better with age. Members grow to know others better and can display richer gospel love to outsiders.

Enduring to Glory

The church, and the small group unit by extension, exists to mature the saints until they are presented full on the day of Christ. James Samra argues in his book *Being Conformed to Christ in Community* that “Paul’s apostolic mission entailed delivering mature believers on the day of Christ Jesus.”⁶⁹ The church shares this goal, that every

⁶⁷Tim Lane and Paul Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2006), 11.

⁶⁸Ortlund, *The Gospel*, 23.

⁶⁹James Samra, *Being Conformed to Christ in Community: A Study of Maturity, Maturation and the Local Church in the Undisputed Pauline Epistles* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 36. Samra

member stand mature and fully assured in Christ until their death or Christ's return. With a long-range end goal in mind, the church commits in broad ways to every member and in a narrow focus to a few members to see them persevere in Christ. It is in his church that Jesus manifests himself to his people in care. The fellow members of the church, the leaders of the church, each share unique responsibility to manifest the presence, power, and work of Christ in the lives of the church in an enduring fashion.⁷⁰

Exhortation and Stirring to Endurance

Members of the narrow commitment are known and loved. Out of a knowledge of love and an embrace of transparency, committed members are able speak the truth in gracious ways to deep hurt and struggle in the life of other members. This exhortation happens through larger group conversations and personal interactions. Members are able to speak the truth in love, because they see the areas where others are tempted to believe the lie and need the truth of the gospel. In addition to exhortation, members stir to love and good deeds. Among a people prone to selfish ambition and apathy, indifference, and giving up, the community of Christ prompts humility, meekness, and zeal. There are three primary ways this happens in committed smaller groups of the larger committed church.

Reading the Scripture together. Bible intake is an important aspect of life together in Christian community. The word of God renews and transforms God's people as it is both understood and applied in community. In his book *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church* professor Donald S. Whitney lauds the benefit of learning in the local church because it "allows for dialogue, modeling, hands-on practice, and other means of

contends based on Phil 2:12-18, 1 Thess 2:17-3:13, and Rom 15:14-21 as well as others that Paul's goal was more than just the conversion of a multitude of people to be organized into churches but rather that those who began following Christ under as a result of his ministry would persevere in Christ and not fall away that his labor might not be in vain.

⁷⁰Samra, *The Gift of Church*, 121.

learning with accompany and complement the academic side of discipleship.”⁷¹ Without the local church Christians can hear the Bible taught in sermons and books, but they will miss the particularized care of shepherds, disciplers, and mentors who can not only help apply the word but who often model obedience in a close proximity that members will never experience from more prominent Bible teachers and authors. Brad Watson describes the community’s need for the Bible when he writes, “A community that has any ambition to be more than a dinner club, must come humbly to the Bible as the necessary source of understanding who God is . . . the Bible carries weight. The Spirit works through Scripture like lightening through steel to electrify our faith.”⁷² Members need the divine authority of the Bible spoken to them regularly by members of the body of Christ intent on their maturity and growth. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation.”⁷³ Indeed, members need to know the speech of God together with the family of God.⁷⁴

Praying together. The second aspect of our exhortation and stirring is prayer.

⁷¹Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 181.

⁷²Watson, *Sent Together*, locs. 595-600.

⁷³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper Collins, 1954), 23.

⁷⁴In the seventeenth century Philip Jacob Spener identified deficiencies in church life among an ill-prepared clergy and waning congregations. Philip Spener, *Pia Desideria* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977). Spener begins a chapter on proposals to correct the current conditions of the church calling for “a more extensive use of the word of God among us” (87). He does not argue for a more extensive pulpit ministry in public preaching, but for private reading the Scripture in homes, for gatherings of Christians to read books of the Bible one after another with few comment, and for “an apostolic kind of church meetings” citing 1 Cor 14:26-40 (89). These meetings would include several ministers or lay-people reading the Scripture aloud and discussing “each verse in order to discover its simple meaning and whatever may be useful for the edification of all.” Spener is arguing for a small group of Christians to study the Bible together “with an eye to the glory of God, to the spiritual growth of the participants, and therefore also to their limitations” (90). The result, he says, will be preachers knowing their congregants lives better and a better confidence in God’s word as people are allowed time for questions and discussions.

Living together in community as the family of God means members are dependent on our heavenly Father who welcomes their requests. To see the Spirit transform and use members for the mission of God, they must dependently pray. Brad Watson suggests that small groups pray the Bible, reading a passage together and letting people pray in the text in their own words.⁷⁵ Further, Watson states it is best to promote conversational, short prayers offered in our normal voices with space for silence. After all, prayer is speaking to the Father who has adopted his people and formed them a family, he knows their hearts and needs even before they ask.⁷⁶ Bill Clem notes that prayer was not just a special gathering of the early church; it was a part of their community life together (Acts 2:42). “Prayer is part of what it means to love God as a worshiper. We learn to communicate with him in prayer. Praying in community is also part of a shared worship experience.”⁷⁷ Referring to Paul’s prayers for the church in Ephesians 3:14-21 and Philippians 1:9-11 Clem asks,

Would your community look different if you prayed like this for one another, even if you prayed these very prayers? When I read these prayers, I don’t know if there was an Ephesian or a Philippian with a runaway donkey, or an exam, or a potential job, but I do know about Jesus and the greatness of the life experience he intends for his followers. Somehow I think we have shrunk our prayer life to to-do lists for God, and we have shrunk our worship life in the process. Here is how Luke describes an unshrunk worshiping heart in Acts 2: “Awe came upon every soul” (verse 43). Gospel community helps fan the flame of awe within the soul by being a worshipful community.⁷⁸

Confession and belief together. A final aspect of exhortation and stirring is the two-fold practice of repenting of sin in confession and believing the gospel. In gospel renewal we see the severity of sin, the holiness of God, and the grace available in Christ. As members live together for gospel renewal, speaking of God through his word, praying

⁷⁵Watson, *Sent Together*, locs. 625-35.

⁷⁶Watson, *Sent Together*, locs. 625-35.

⁷⁷Bill Clem, *Disciple: Getting Your Identity from Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 127.

⁷⁸Clem, *Disciple*, 127-28.

for his work in their midst, they will uncover more and more of their failures, shortcomings, and need for Christ. Therefore, the ongoing life of the committed narrow group within the church is a life of confessing sin and believing on Christ.

Watson suggests a community have regular times of reflection, asking things like, “Where have we, as a group, put our trust in things that are not Jesus? Where are we experiencing God’s kindness? Do you think we are drawing nearer to God or running away from God?”⁷⁹ “Confession,” Watson says, “is the act of ‘saying the same thing as God’ or naming reality. We grow in our love for God by being honest about who we are and how we live. We lower the facade and tell the truth.”⁸⁰ Confessing individual and corporate sin opens members up to believe together on Christ as their propitiation and life.

Practicing Bible intake, prayer, and confession and faith in commitment to a few saints in the local church fulfills the imperative Christians share to exhort one another daily and to stir each up to love and good works. As believers exercise these avenues of grace in a long-term commitment with fellow saints they create a gracious atmosphere that fosters maturity and growth among God’s people. In this way, they see the gospel use the formed people of faith for the individual and church’s benefit and for God’s glory.

Small Groups as Communities on the Mission of God

The people of God live for the mission of God. The work of mission is more effectively carried out in a narrow commitment to a few saints within the larger body of Christ. This smaller group can offer more intensive support, equipping, easier to see example of faithful proclamation. The committed family of the small group unit also serves to display the characteristics of Christ-like love among a people who know each

⁷⁹Watson, *Sent Together*, locs. 679-84.

⁸⁰Watson, *Sent Together*, locs. 637-40.

other well. Generous love is manifest among a group committed to one another as a family, which is an apologetic for the gospel.

The Mission of God

“As the Father has sent me,” Jesus said addressing his disciples in his post-resurrection appearance in John’s gospel, “even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). Gregg Allison notes, “Jesus commissioned his disciples with the same commission with which he had been commissioned by the Father.”⁸¹ In this account readers behold the intention of God from before the foundation of the world, manifest in the garden, in Abraham, Israel, the Messiah, now clearly revealed. This commission was to spread the gospel by making disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded. This is the mission of God, to spread his fame in calling his people to himself through his emissaries.

Bruce Ashford traces the discussion of the mission of God in the church to books II-IV of Augustine’s *On the Trinity* wherein he argues for all three persons of the Godhead must agree in any sending in the divine mission.⁸² From the patristic period to the twentieth century there is not much evidence for study and articulation of the mission of God. Ashford, following Christopher Wright, argues that the mission of God must be understood in all the Scripture, not just the commissioning passages of the New Testament. Therefore, he traces the mission of God from creation, through the fall, to restoration in Christ and his new creation. In so doing he rightly places the church in a gospel context for spreading the new creation of Christ in mission.

The church, as Lesslie Newbigin argues, carries out the mission of God in their own culture by obedient participation in the action of the Holy Spirit as the gospel is

⁸¹Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 141.

⁸²Bruce Ashford, “The Church in the Mission of God,” in *The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church*, ed. Kendell H. Easley and Christopher W. Morgan (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 238.

believed through proclamation and Christ is confessed as Lord.⁸³ Peter made the confession of Jesus as the Christ by revelation of the Father in Matthew 16. This revealing of the true nature of the Son of God is still an activity of God carried out by the Spirit through the church. Summarizing Newbigin, Craig Van Gelder writes that the church is a redemptive sign of God's present kingdom, a foretaste of the eschatological reign already begun, and an instrument to bring the redemptive reign of Christ to bear in all creation.⁸⁴ Similarly Dwight Zscheile describes the church as "a product of and participant of God's mission. It exists to share meaningfully in the triune God's creative, reconciling, healing, restoring movement in the world . . . local churches are central to God's mission as they discern God's movement in their particular times and places and join up with it."⁸⁵ The universal church is made visible and spreads out on mission through its local outposts.

The Broad Commitment to the Mission of God

The whole church is united around the mission of God. For instance, the John Newton Brown produced covenant published in 1853 that became a standard in Baptist life in the 20th century called for the church to engage to see "the spread of the gospel through all nations" and "to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances."⁸⁶ Gregg Allison defines the missional character of the church as he defines her as "the body of divinely called and divinely sent ministers proclaiming the gospel and advancing the kingdom of God."⁸⁷ Michael Green in his book *Evangelism in the Local Church*

⁸³Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 20.

⁸⁴Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 3.

⁸⁵Dwight J. Zscheile, "A Missional Theology of Spiritual Formation," in *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation*, ed. Dwight J. Zscheile (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 6.

⁸⁶Deweese, *Baptist Church Covenants*, 161-62.

⁸⁷Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 140.

writes, “It is through His people that God means to communicate with those He longs to reach. The reality of what He offers is best seen in the lives of those who have begun to be changed by it.”⁸⁸ The church functions together as a whole on the mission of God to see the news of Christ spread to those who have not yet heard and obeyed the gospel.

The redeemed life of the church is a display of the glory of God. The whole church commits to displaying together the grace of God in the way they are gracious with one another, exhibiting forgiveness in their forbearance, showing God’s mercy in their mercy toward one another. In its broad every-member commitment the church manifests the presence of Christ to outsiders. Jesus has taken on flesh to make God known and knowable (John 1:18; Col 1:15-20). This revelation of God in Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). While Jesus has died, been raised, and ascended to heaven, his real presence is still seen and felt in the world through his church. James Samra says “The church is God’s way of making his invisible Son (to us on earth) visible again.”⁸⁹ Samra goes on to cite Karl Barth in *The Gift of Church* saying the “earthly historical form of existence of Jesus Christ” right now on earth as “the Christian community.”⁹⁰ Just as Jesus makes the Father visible, so the church makes Jesus visible. The church’s work in the mission of God is carried out together as those who display the power of the gospel in gracious living and those who declare it with support, encouragement, and prayer within the body.

Narrow Commitment to the Mission of God

While the broad commitment to every church member is a commitment to see the gospel spread in collective prayer, witness, and sacrificial giving, the mission of God in ordinary life flourishes in the narrow commitment of the small group. The more

⁸⁸Michael Green, *Evangelism through the Local Church* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, 1992), 20.

⁸⁹Samra, *The Gift of Church*, 119, 121.

⁹⁰Samra, *The Gift of Church*, 121.

intimate care and equipping that a smaller group of committed Christians provide is a better breeding ground for mission in the church. A lifestyle of intentional gospel proclamation is easier when a believer is regularly with others who share that goal. This group of like-minded missionaries motivates mission.

As a smaller slice of the whole church, the small group serves as a microcosm of the broad commitment that enables members to engage meaningfully in the promotion of mission together. While not eliminating the responsibility to care for all members of the church, the small group provides a focused place to function as the family of God in regular contact. This creates an ability to express love, forgiveness, and patience with greater regularity and intensity.

Community love is magnified in the narrow commitment. The people of God display the truth and power of the gospel in the way that they live together in unity and love.⁹¹ All people will know Jesus' disciples by the love they have for one another (John 13:34-35). This love sets apart and beckons for a reason that such love can exist among sinners (1 Pet 3:15). This love is visible in a broad commitment to many saints, but it is a more tangible and deeper love expressed among a narrow commitment to a few saints. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis make the argument this way in *Total Church*, "Christian community is a vital part of Christian mission. Mission takes place as people see our love for one another. We all know that the gospel is communicated both through the words we say and the lives we live. What Jesus says is that it is the life we live together that counts."⁹² They go on to make the argument from experience that people

⁹¹Chester and Timmis state, "Jesus prays that those who believe in the gospel 'may be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me' (John 17:20-23). The world will know that Jesus is the Son of God sent by God to be Savior of the world through the community of believers. 'No one has ever seen God,' says John in his Gospel, 'but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known' (John 1:18). The invisible God is made visible through the Son of God. 'No one has ever seen God,' says John again in his first letter, 'but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us' (1 John 4:12). The invisible God is made visible though the love of the people of God. The life of the Christian community is part of the way by which the gospel is communicated." Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 58-59.

⁹²Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 58.

often come to find the community life of Christians more attractive initially than they find the message of the gospel, but that the message of the gospel is then verified in the lives of repenting and believing Christians.

The continuity and regularity of shared life together creates more missional displays of community love. Because the larger family gathers only once a week, the opportunities for encouragement in mission are less than when the smaller family group of the church gathers more frequently.⁹³ When the church gathers frequently in smaller groups and intentionally lives together as a family, it creates more opportunities to spur one another on in the work of living as a missionary. It also multiplies the opportunities to invite non-Christians into their gathering to see the Christian community in action. Unleashing the attractational power of a group of born again people with supernatural love for one another will do more than regular attractational services and events.

Committed for Mission

Living on mission is easier when Christians surround themselves with other people on mission. When members commit to live as a family with fellow church members they are promising to give and receive the love, instruction, encouragement, and correction of a family. They are committing to maturity together. The result of that maturing together is an equipped and empowered people for mission, a people able to live and speak the truth of the gospel to those near and far from God.

The narrow commitment of the small group in the life of the church provides an avenue for maturing Christians to pursue and invite non-Christians to see and hear the gospel. Timmis and Chester believe that “evangelism is best done out of the context of a gospel community whose corporate life demonstrates the reality of the word that gave her

⁹³Even in settings where the church hosts gatherings multiple times a week that all attend, generally attendance is smaller and these gatherings tend to be more formalized “face the front” type gatherings with conversation happening before the formal gathering begins and after it ends.

life.”⁹⁴ The church that lives like a family together on mission portrays the adoption of God in the gospel by free grace most compellingly before a watching world.

The Benefits of Small Group Mission

The narrow commitment of life together in community offers accountability for living on the mission of God. In the life of a biological family there is a check and balance on the individual members. So also in church family life there is a shared accountability. As members meet together regularly, share struggles, confess sin, and offer care, they are given the opportunity to share in the bearing of burdens and to run to Christ together. They have a family that asks regularly about the state of their souls and exercises their concern and care through eager support and love.

In the small group commitment members also have the example of others that motivates them in the mission of God. Caleb Crider reminds us, “Mission is not about location, it’s about identity. Because we are followers of a missionary God who has revealed Himself through the Missionary son, mission is central to our identity as Christians. Mission is not something we do, it’s something we are.”⁹⁵ As Christians live out our identity as missionaries together the success and triumph they experience in other’s stories motivates the way they engage their neighbors and co-workers. Similarly, witnessing perseverance amidst struggle in the lives of those nearby offers a hopeful example to emulate. So in triumph and failure members live together for one another’s stirring up to love and good works.

A third benefit to living on mission in a committed church family is balance. Life together on mission presents a resounding and full witness in the chorus of many

⁹⁴Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 58. Similarly in Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 28, “Evangelism will not take place until we go out to connect with them where they are, where they feel comfortable, on their territory. We cannot assume people will come to us. We must go to them. We need to do church and mission in the context of everyday life. We can no longer think of church as a meeting on a Sunday morning. We must think of church as a community of people who share life, ordinary life.”

⁹⁵Caleb Crider et al., *Tradecraft: For the Church on Mission* (Portland, OR: Urban Loft Publishers, 2013), 24.

lives. It gives a filling in the gaps among the body – the introvert and extrovert team up for mission. The one taking out the trash and cooking the meal serves alongside the one ready to speak the word of the gospel. “By making evangelism a community project, it also takes seriously the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in distributing a variety of gifts among his people.”⁹⁶ A naturally introverted person might be able to invite their co-worker for dinner in their home and the more outgoing members of the group might make a great connection with them. The balance among the group is achieved as the different gifts and roles are exercised graciously.

The assurance of others’ prayer is an additional resource given by the commitment of a church family on mission. Life together in small group focuses the prayer life of other church members into meaningful known needs and godly ambitions. So as members know one member is sharing the gospel with a coworker, they can pray. As they know one member is struggling with temptation to gluttony or body image issues, they can pray. The members’ praying for one another is informed by the time spent together and the care they exercise regularly. And members gain boldness in gospel witness knowing that their family of faith is interceding as they engage an unbeliever with the gospel.

An additional benefit of commitment to a group of saints participating in the mission of God is the sweetness of love, forgiveness, and humility displayed in life together. As members endure with one another and stand fast in loving help when others might run away we display a graciousness that demonstrates the truth of the gospel for those outside of Christ. The depth of relationship for those who commit to one another over the long haul of life together speaks a better word of the gospel’s power to persevere and transform.

⁹⁶Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 59.

The Arena of Small Group Missional Living

The family life of the small group exercises its missional engagement primarily in two spheres of ordinary life: among the networks they have as individuals and among the neighborhood they represent. The first sphere is an existing network of people or opportunities to meet people and the second is geographical. Whichever approach is used, or a combination of the two, the focus of a group on a common mission is their cohesive effort to engage a particular group of people or geographic area with the gospel.⁹⁷

The work of mission propels Christians to engage new people with the gospel, but it begins with those they are already near. Every person has an existing sphere of connection among family members, neighbors, co-workers, and those they interact with as they shop, exercise, leisure, etc. Key to family life together on mission is engaging those people that members already interact with in ordinary life. The call of mission is not just to new areas, but also to engage current spheres of influence with gospel intentionality. The ordinary Christian life is a mission field full of opportunity. Timmis and Chester write, “The ordinary needs to be saturated with a commitment to living and proclaiming the gospel. The gospel is a message, and so mission only takes place as we share that word with people.”⁹⁸

The second arena focus for missional engagement by a small group is on a particular neighborhood or geographical area. This looks like a group of families in a neighborhood focusing on missional engagement among their neighbors, nearby school, gym, etc. The group prays for the people and events of the area. They spend intentional time making connections in the area. They invite neighbors in the area to meals and events. In their book *The Missional Leader* Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk remind the church, “people hunger to be welcomed today.”⁹⁹ In a world where we must create

⁹⁷Watson, *Sent Together*, locs. 1009-10.

⁹⁸Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 63.

⁹⁹Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 156.

programs and ways to protect ourselves from the harm others might do the stranger is generally received suspiciously. And yet Christians have an opportunity in hospitality to welcome the stranger in the formation of a better parallel culture. As members focus on extending a hospitable welcome they participate in extending the welcome of God to those far from him.

Focusing on a geographical area is still relationally focused; its goal is building relationships and making connections with the people who live, work, and leisure in that particular geographical area. Brad Watson speaks from his experience as he notes, “Neighbors enjoy having people that gather and bond people together. Through this type of mission, many communities begin to care for the needs of single mothers, people with disabilities, and the working poor.”¹⁰⁰ As the group engages their network and neighborhood, shared affinities, passions, and common interests with non-Christians are a tool they can use to foster relationship, but they are not a key organizing principle. The gospel remains the centerpiece of group life together, even as they engage people who share interests. The shared interests never come to define the group. Gospel love expressed in community for mission defines the group.

Engaging neighborhoods means engaging the people who live in close proximity. These are the people that share our convenience stores, gym, restaurants, etc. They may not enjoy the same hobbies as others, but they will be living and moving in the same spaces for the necessities of daily life. These small groups can be intentional in where they shop and leisure, aiming to engage neighbors through repeated opportunities. Brad Watson says, “Some great next steps include joining the neighborhood association meetings, finding needs within the community to meet, and becoming the people who welcome new people in and create space for people to get to know each other.”¹⁰¹ As a

¹⁰⁰Watson, *Sent Together*, locs. 1025-27.

¹⁰¹Watson, *Sent Together*, locs. 1014-17.

small group unit aims to bring the gospel they have received and display together to bear on a people in a place near them they can through hospitality begin to intentionally engage those far from God.

The gathered community of Christ is an apologetic for the gospel. When a non-Christian can witness the love that Christians have for one another, they witness the power of the gospel transforming a heart in forgiveness, patience, and love (Col 3:12-17). The gathered community of Christ is also a sending agency. When the group gathers for discipleship they are equipped for mission. When members see the example of others we are motivated and made ready for mission. When members pray for and with others they are encouraged for mission. Jonathan Dodson and Brad Watson summarize it this way, “Mission is not merely an activity; it is our identity! Being missional is being yourself. It is making disciples where you live with your community as you collectively follow Jesus.”¹⁰²

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that committing to small group units within a larger church body increases the effectiveness of discipleship and mission in the life of the church by narrowing the focus of our efforts into manageable portions of the body. Small group units position members to speak the gospel to one another for their maturity, to endure with fellow saints, and to display and declare the gospel to outsiders. The broad covenant commitment we make to every member of the church for discipleship and perseverance is amplified when we take responsibility to live closely with a few fellow committed saints. Participating as a church in the mission of God among a small group gives an opportunity for magnified love among believers and situates them to extend the welcome of Christ with a people they know and love. God matures Christians through the

¹⁰²Jonathan K. Dodson and Brad Watson, *Called Together: A Guide to Forming Missional Communities* (Austin, TX: GCD Books, 2014), 53.

gospel in the midst of a community of faith for the purpose of his mission in the world, and this happens best in the context of a smaller group of saints who can know and love one another well. These truths are foundational to developing a small group structure that facilitates discipleship and mission. As the project is carried out, these emphases of gospel, community, and mission are central to its development.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

Introduction

This chapter describes the preparation and completion of the ministry project. It includes a detailed analysis of the project's purpose, goals, and research findings. The purpose of the project was to develop a small group structure that cultivates discipleship and missional living at Cherokee Baptist church in Memphis, Tennessee. The key elements of the project included assessing the church's understanding and practice of discipleship and mission, developing and teaching a six week curriculum to strengthen their understanding and practice of discipleship and mission as a church, and creating long-term strategies for organizing small groups in the life of the church for discipleship and mission. Implementing the project began on February 6, 2017 and continued until June 21, 2017.

The implementation of this project was well timed within the life of the church. In the previous three years of ministry, the church developed informal structures for regular life together in small groups that had been successful. In fact, in the weeks prior to beginning the project the small group gatherings had outgrown their possible venues and were considering moving to the church campus. The church was due to multiply groups and needed the formal structure for small groups the project was designed to give.

Developing the Curriculum

Beginning with the exegesis from chapter 2 of this project, six lessons were planned covering the introduction, biblical foundations for the small groups, and practical outworking in life together. The material from chapter 3 was added in the appropriate

session and together with the exegesis from the second chapter formed a starting place for creating teaching sessions. Beginning in mid-March I chose one session per week to edit and prepare as a manuscript with an additional classroom handout. I sent these manuscripts for peer review to two lay leaders in the church that would serve as group leaders during implementation. During the week leading up to the delivery of the session I would meet with this peer review panel to receive feedback and suggestions. These review sessions took place as face-to-face meetings and provided helpful guidance as I connected the material from exegesis and research to our church context. Suggestions ranged from the type of structure the group meetings would have, what would go on during group meetings, and what missional engagement would look like to things like doctrinal suggestions that helped build the lesson's structure on gospel community in a right understanding of adoption into the family of God. The input from the peer review provided excellent insight into the manuscripts and teaching sessions. As a part of this peer review, reviewers evaluated the curriculum on a four-point scale ranking subjects from insufficient to exemplary. The criteria of evaluation required the curriculum to teach the gospel, present discussion of biblical community, be biblically and theologically sound, state clearly a thesis for each lesson, support the thesis, contain points of practical application, and sufficiently cover the material. Each reviewer scored the curriculum above the require 90 percent approval, finding it overall exemplary.

Promoting the Project

Following the planning and initial manuscript period that began in early February 2017, I began promoting the curriculum implementation during the week of March 3, 2017. In order to target the general audience in attendance for our Core Seminar hour on Sunday mornings I emailed them instructions and a passcode to complete the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA). This group also makes up the usual attendees to our informal small group gatherings. The email noted an April 16, 2017 start date for the Core Seminar on groups as well as giving rationale and instructions for

completing the survey. On March 27, 2017, I sent a second email to the group, asking those who had not yet completed the survey to please do so as time allowed. On April 17, 2017, I also sent a follow-up to two members who began the survey but had not completed it. In order to promote for a broader audience, on April 2, 2017, announcements were added to our weekly update email, worship guide announcement section, and pre- and post-worship gathering projected slides to inform our members of the new subject that would be taught in Core Seminar. The planned start date of April 16, 2017 was postponed one week to allow for survey completion and a few final steps of curriculum preparation. Our project was also delightfully interrupted with the surprise adoption of newborn twin daughters on February 27, 2017. We immediately adjusted work schedules to accommodate our new lifestyle and took two weeks off to adjust to our new home dynamic. This joyful addition postponed our plans for project implementation as well as the write-up and review process.

Implementing the Project

From February 6, 2017, until April 23, 2017, the project consisted of preparation, study, writing, and review of the Core Seminar Training manuscripts and classroom handouts. On April 23, 2017 we began a six-week training in the form of a Core Seminar on subsequent Sunday mornings. In this Core Seminar format we taught through each of the six sessions to a mixed group of members and visitors. This training was preceded by completion of the TDA by a number of church member attendees and was followed by a second survey through the TDA. For the final three weeks of the Core Seminar Training, pilot groups began to meet to pray, implement, and discuss the training.

Concluding the Project

On June 21, 2017, all of the post-training assessments were completed and the data collection was finalized. The TDA program from LifeWay Christian Resources

offered detailed reports of the data as well as the hard numbers behind the data with responses to each question. Evaluating this information was made easier in initial stages due to the specialized reports LifeWay offered.

Reviewing the Project

In subsequent sections the data will be presented under the three major goals of the project. This allows each goal to be evaluated based on experience and results. The TDA data gives the ability to measure results and build from one goal to the next, eventually successfully completing each.

Goal 1: Understanding and Practice Assessment

The first goal of the project was successfully accomplished with the completion of the TDA.¹ The TDA gave a clear synopsis of discipleship and missional practices of members by examining a number of identified categories of assessment. In particular, we focused on the data related to discipleship and mission in community in order to understand from the pre-test the current knowledge base and practice of members.²

Discipleship

The TDA offers concrete measurements for discipleship. Categories such as Bible engagement, obedience, service, doctrinal positions, and seeking God offer a clear picture of various aspects of life as a disciple of Christ. The TDA revealed that on average the respondents were regular in Bible reading at least a few times a week with a

¹Twelve participants completed TDAs during pre-test survey and 9 completed TDAs during post-test. For the pre-test data under goal 1 I have included all 12 responses in the tables because it gives a better picture of the understanding and practice of the group. For the post-test description under goal 2 using the 9 returned surveys the analysis data is compared only to the same 9 individuals who completed the pre-test. The three pre-test assessments that did not receive a corresponding post-test are included under goal 1 but excluded from analysis under goal 2.

²All of the research instruments used in this project was performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

third of respondents noting they read the Bible daily. Tables 1 and 2 show the data collected in pre-test assessments.

Table 1. TDA analysis of Bible engagement

Bible Engagement Questions	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I desire to please and honor Jesus in all that I do.	1	0	0	3	8
If I go several days without reading the Bible I find myself unfulfilled.	0	0	1	4	7
Throughout the day I find myself thinking about biblical truths.	0	0	1	7	4
I have made a serious attempt to discover God's will for my life.	0	0	1	4	7
I am open and responsive to those in my church who teach the Bible.	0	1	1	1	9

Table 2. TDA analysis of Bible engagement frequency

Bible Engagement Questions	Rarely/ Never	Once a month	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day
About how often, if at all, do you personally read the Bible? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.	0	0	1	0	7	4
About how often, if at all, do you personally study the Bible (more in-depth than just reading it)? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.	2	0	1	3	6	0

Similarly in other categories pertaining to discipleship, respondents ranked as either moderate or consistent in spiritual development. On a five-point scale the group ranked a 4.94 of 5 in doctrinal positions, a 4.51 of 5 in obeying God and denying self, and a 3.65 of 5 in serving God and others. The data gave me a picture of discipleship

understanding and practice demonstrated by what they believe to be true about God and his commands on their life as his people as well as how they strive to obey those commands and practice spiritual disciplines like daily Bible reading.

Relationships and Missional Engagement

A second area of interest in pre-training survey responses is respondents' current missional practices. To assess these areas the data collected by the TDA was organized under the subjects of building relationships, sharing Christ, and unashamed.³ The results demonstrated that all respondents had an awareness of their responsibility to share the gospel with non-Christians and various levels of comfort, ability, and regularity in exercising that responsibility. One hundred percent of respondents indicated they strongly agree with the statement, "I have a personal responsibility to share my religious beliefs about Jesus Christ with non-Christians." According to the data, more than half the respondents are putting that awareness into action by telling someone how they became a Christian in the last month, and all but one indicated they pray for the spiritual status of non-Christians. Likewise ten out of twelve responses agreed with the statement, "I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them." Tables 3 through 6 show pre-test data regarding evangelistic categories in the TDA.

³By "unashamed" the TDA refers to believers' courage to share the gospel and to let others know they follow Christ.

Table 3. TDA analysis of sharing Christ

Sharing Christ Questions	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Some what Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel comfortable that I can share my belief in Christ to someone else effectively.	0	4	0	6	2
While interacting with others on a normal, daily basis, I seek opportunities to speak about Jesus Christ.	0	2	2	8	0
I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them.	0	1	1	7	3
I have a personal responsibility to share my religious beliefs about Jesus Christ with non-Christians.	0	0	0	0	12

Table 4. TDA analysis of frequency of praying for non-Christians

Sharing Christ Question	Rarely/ Never	Once a month	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day
About how often, if at all, do you personally pray for the spiritual status of people you know who are not professing Christians? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.	1	0	2	2	4	3

Table 5. TDA analysis of frequency of sharing Christ

Sharing Christ Questions	Zero	1-2 times	3-5 times	6-9 times	10 or more times
In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, shared with someone how to become a Christian?	5	2	3	2	0
In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, invited an unchurched person to attend a church service or some other program at your church?	2	3	4	0	3

Table 6. Analysis of promoted Christianity

Ashamed Questions	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Many people who know me are not aware that I am a Christian.	7	3	2	0	0
I am generally a different person in public than I am in private.	3	4	1	4	0
I am hesitant to let others know that I am a Christian.	7	0	2	3	0

Assessing the TDA data to understand the discipleship and missional practices of respondents allowed for successful completion of the first goal of the project. The data demonstrated areas of strength and weakness in discipleship and missional practices and provided a solid foundational assessment that informed curriculum development and implementation.

Goal 1 Assessment and Conclusion

Surveying the data solidified what we assumed from anecdotal evidence and pastoral experience over the past six years. In the context of our church revitalization there have been a number of new families enter the church through membership transfer or baptism that have committed to what we hope is a doctrinally rich, missionally driven church. The data verified what we thought, mainly that our people generally know the Bible and know their responsibility to share Christ, but they struggle with practicing evangelism consistently. The second goal of this project sought to remedy the distance between knowledge and practice by casting vision through teaching a model of small group ministry that exists for both discipleship and mission.

Goal 2: Curriculum Development and Implementation

The pre-training TDA responses provided an understanding of the current beliefs and practices among group members and informed the preparation of training

materials. With the appropriate understanding and groundwork accomplished, the second goal was fulfilled as I developed and taught the training material to help members turn their awareness into better practice in community.

Curriculum Development

In some ways, this curriculum was almost three years in the making. It was developed as the culture of our church changed in that time span to reflect a more hospitable, open-home embrace of life together. There were a number of factors, but a generational shift in the life of the church was a major contributor. In June 2014 the median age of Sunday morning attendees was 73. The average age of that same group was 66. After three years and more funerals than we care to recount, the Lord changed the generational make-up of our church. Now, we enjoy a community that spends time together in significant ways outside of church gatherings. In every stage of curriculum development care was taken to consider this transition in the life of our body and help members across the spectrum to be engaged by both the teaching and structure for small group life.

The basis for the initial stages of curriculum development was the exegesis and research of chapters 2 and 3 of this research project. From that starting point I edited for a 40-minute teaching session format and prepared handouts for attendees. Each week of curriculum implementation my two-person peer review panel offered feedback and insight into what I had prepared for a teaching manuscript. This feedback helped to make sure the material was approachable and fit for our context. Their input helped add missing elements and sharpened the focus of the lesson each week. As a result of their evaluation each reviewer scored the curriculum at over 90 percent satisfactory, thus the curriculum was ready to be implemented.

Curriculum Implementation

Implementing the curriculum began on April 23, 2017 and ran for six

consecutive weeks from 9:30 to 10:20 on Sunday mornings. During this period we were able to gather a representative group that would serve as a “test group” for the new small group structure. These were mainly members who already participate in weekly meals together, along with a few visitors during that time.

The first week served as an introduction titled, “Why Missional Communities?” and followed an outline that argued the smaller focused commitment of membership within a missional community offered a better way to be the church in care for one another and a better way to live on the mission of God together. The second session focused on our commitment to one another in the gospel as a means of sanctification. The two primary texts in this second session were Colossians 1:21-23 and 2:6-7 focused on the imperative to continue walking in the gospel. The third session aimed to bring this gospel commitment into community around the central text of Hebrews 10:19-25, emphasizing God’s use of the gospel in community to stir Christians up to love and good works, to persevere them, and to mature them in Christlikeness. The fourth session explained the missional nature of the community of God’s people by looking at 1 Peter 2:9-10 and other passages. We emphasized that the community develops believers to be missionaries, it displays deeper relationships formed by the gospel, it balances gifts among the various members of the body, and it sustains missionaries for the long haul. The fifth and sixth sessions focused on the rhythms of life the groups would use to structure their commitment to the gospel in community for mission. They included leadership structures, meeting plans, and suggestions for structuring group gatherings.

Strengths. Delivering the training during our Core Seminar time on Sunday mornings offered a captive audience and provided a good cross-section of those who were already participating in groups. It also allowed for potential group leaders and members to be able to receive training at the same time. This gave a common knowledge base as the groups began. One of the greatest strengths of the training was its ability to

subtly shift existing informal practices into formalized, structured groups without causing it to seem like a seismic shift in small group life. By using familiar categories, the training capitalized on existing functions in our body and gave them a formal structure. A final strength of the project was coordinating the subject matter of the training session with that Sunday's worship gathering sermon. This allowed the church at large to be drawn into the subject matter and gave those who attended the training sessions a double exposure to the topics and deepened application.

Weaknesses. Multiple weeks of delivery meant some material was missed, though audio recordings helped fill those gaps. In hindsight, while we felt it was best to begin with members who were already participating in groups, the transition of naming the groups missional communities without teaching it on a broad level to every member caused some confusion among those not taking part in the training. We have since been able to invite others into the pilot groups and teach the material to a broader audience, but initially the limitation caused some confusion.

Things I would do differently. When I teach through this material in future training sessions I will condense sessions five and six into one and shorten the first session into a long introduction to session two. In that format the same amount of material can be condensed into four sessions instead of six. In addition, involving other teachers to cover different sessions would improve content delivery and reception in most cases. There are men and women in the body who are better demonstrators of community and mission than others, and these saints would make able leaders through those particular sessions. When delivered in future the context of a group setting would make for a more powerful learning dynamic. By that I mean delivering the content in a group meeting, on a night of the week, in a member's home. Whether it is on the occasion of preparing for another group to launch or inviting another church in for training, this setting would provide a more informal atmosphere for questions and application

conversation.

Another adjustment I would make to the project if I had to implement it again would be to develop my own pre- and post-training assessment. The TDA provided a helpful glimpse into categories of spiritual maturity and gave me a measurement to base changes in post-test findings, but it was a bit broader in scope than necessary for this project. The assessment could have been more focused on discipleship and mission in community. This is a downside because it made for a taxing assessment to be taken twice by group members and the length and other various questions and subjects may have impacted the data that I sought to collect. Also, the next time I implement a project of this nature I hope to avoid the joyful chaos of adopting newborn twins in the process.

Curriculum Implementation Results

The second goal's intention of implementing a curriculum was built upon the knowledge gained in the assessment period under the first goal. The pre-test and post-test assessments allowed for precise and measurable results from the curriculum implementation. Analyzing the cumulative scores from the pre-test and post-test in a t-test for dependent samples indicates that while there was a positive trend, there was not a significant statistical increase in knowledge and practice of discipleship and mission in community.⁴

To further analyze the results of the curriculum implementation, we are focusing on the two main areas addressed: discipleship and mission in community. Within the measurements given from the TDA that includes studying trends in the data related to Bible engagement, building relationships, sharing Christ, and the section on being unashamed witnesses for Christ.⁵

⁴The teaching curriculum to the select group of participants did not make a statistically significant difference resulting in an increase of their understanding and practice of discipleship and mission in community ($t(17)=-.803055$, $p<.005$). The mean score from pre-test assessments was 84.42 while the post-test assessment mean was 84.94.

⁵The data used to analyze goal 1 included 12 pre-test assessments that offered the fullest description of current understanding and practice of discipleship and mission among group members. As

In the categories measuring growth in understanding and practice of discipleship in community, the subject of Bible engagement had virtually no change between pre-test and post-test assessments. The mean score of questions related to Bible engagement scored a pre-test mean of 4.38 of 5 and a post-test mean of 4.30. Approximately 22 percent of respondents in the post-test indicated they read their Bible one time a week or less. In response to a question about more in-depth Bible study, 55 percent indicated they study the Bible more than just reading once a week or less. The assessment exposed a need for ongoing training that missional communities should address long-term. This will be revisited in long-term planning for missional communities, as the structure provides an accountable environment for spiritual disciplines like daily Bible reading.

The category of building relationships gives insight into the practice of both discipleship and mission in the community of the church. The data did not show a significant change resulting from the curriculum implementation. Thankfully both pre-test and post-test analysis showed a high level of connection and meaningful relationships in the life of the church. In post-test assessment 88.9 percent of respondents strongly agree that they have developed significant relationships with people at the church. Additionally, strong agreement responses made up 44.4 percent of post-test respondents to the statement, “I intentionally spend time with believers to help them grow in their faith.”

The data collected from respondents about sharing Christ demonstrated small-scale positive trends. The mean responses increased from a pre-test 3.5 to post-test 3.65, but the data from individual questions revealed encouraging results. The respondents’ awareness of their responsibility to share Christ remained strong and steady, with a full 100 percent indicating strong agreement that it was their personal responsibility to share

we compare the data from pre-test and post-test analysis, the 3 pre-test assessments that did not have corresponding post-tests were excluded from analysis.

Jesus with non-Christians. Also, members indicated in post-test assessment that they had shared the gospel more in the six months prior than they had in pre-test assessment. The mean average increased slightly in response to the statement, “In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, shared with someone how to become a Christian. Prior to curriculum implementation 41.7 percent of respondents indicated they had shared the gospel zero times in the previous six months. Following the curriculum implementation, the number of those indicating they had not shared the gospel in the past six months fell to 11.1 percent. There was also an increase indicating the respondent had shared the gospel six to nine times, and an increase indicating they had shared the gospel 1-2 times in the past six months.

In addition to increased evangelism the data showed more people were invited to a church service or church program following the curriculum implementation. Those inviting three to five times remained the same but there was a decrease among those indicating they had had not invited anyone to church in the past six months and an increase in those inviting at least one to two times during that period. In connection with evangelism, there was an increase in prayer for non-Christians. Assessments from before the curriculum implementation showed 16.7 percent praying only a few times a month for non-Christians spiritual status and 8.3 percent not praying at all. In assessments following the curriculum implementation all respondents indicated praying at least once a week for non-Christians. Finally, the data also indicated an increase in members’ understanding and execution of evangelism as an ordinary routine of their daily life. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “While interacting with others on a normal, daily basis, I seek opportunities to speak about Jesus Christ,” at least 88 percent agreed with the statement in post-test survey compared to 66 percent in pre-test survey. Tables 7 through 9 show post-test data from TDA regarding evangelism.

Table 7. TDA analysis of post-curriculum sharing Christ

Sharing Christ Questions	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel comfortable that I can share my belief in Christ to someone else effectively.	0	3	0	5	1
While interacting with others on a normal, daily basis, I seek opportunities to speak about Jesus Christ.	0	1	0	8	0
I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them.	0	0	1	6	2
I have a personal responsibility to share my religious beliefs about Jesus Christ with non-Christians.	0	0	0	0	9

Table 8. TDA analysis of post-curriculum praying for non-Christians

Sharing Christ Question	Rarely/ Never	Once a month	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day
About how often, if at all, do you personally pray for the spiritual status of people you know who are not professing Christians? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.	0	0	0	3	4	2

Table 9. TDA analysis of frequency of post-curriculum sharing Christ

Sharing Christ Question	Zero	1-2 times	3-5 times	6-9 times	10 or more times
In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, shared with someone how to become a Christian?	1	5	2	2	0
In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, invited an unchurched person to attend a church service or some other program at your church?	1	3	3	0	2

The other data that notes advance in discipleship and mission in community is

the post-training involvement in missional communities. The two pilot groups have met since the halfway point in the curriculum implementation and have seen an increase in attendance among those not formerly participating in small groups. Attendance in pilot groups increased in the initial month of meetings by 7 individuals, 4 joining one group and 3 in the other, while multiple non-Christian neighbors also attended meals with missional communities.

Another strength of the curriculum implementation and establishment of groups has been improved methods of ministry to children as groups gather. Previously, there were no plans for children's ministry during group meetings or during gatherings of members through the week. Now, as a result of the gathering of missional communities, intentional plans for children's ministry have development and been implemented among the groups. Songs, catechisms, and memory verses fill a portion of our gathering time as various members of the group lead a session for children while the others in the group meet for discussion.

Goal 3: Strategic Priorities

The final goal of this project is to develop a strategic priorities document for missional communities in the life of our church.⁶ This goal builds on the assessments and curriculum implementation and offers a structure and schedule for meetings, group and leader development, and group multiplication in the future.

Addressing Weaknesses

The TDA not only offered measurable results of curriculum implementation, but it also exposed weaknesses in our understanding and practice that may or may not have improved during the course of curriculum implementation. The long-term strategic plan offers an opportunity to address those weaknesses in a systematic fashion.

⁶See appendix 4 for the strategic priority document.

Addressing these issues will be detailed at the beginning of this section, as they will inform the content and process for long-term strategic planning moving forward.

One finding from the TDA is the need for increased Bible engagement among this sample of members. The data from post-test assessments indicated that at approximately 77 percent of respondents do not practice daily Bible reading as a spiritual discipline. While the majority of the responses fell into the “at least a few times a week” category, the goal of church members is daily time spent in God’s word. In addition, 100 percent of respondents indicated at least a few times a week or less when asked, “About how often, if at all, do you personally study the Bible (more in-depth than just reading it)?” No one indicated they study the Bible in-depth every day. Missional communities offer an ideal medium for addressing Bible engagement among members. The community of committed members includes accountability and ongoing care among a group cultivating transparency and openness with one another. Knowing that some struggle with daily Bible reading our long-term strategic priorities will include increasing awareness among leaders that members struggle with daily Bible reading and likely other spiritual disciplines as well. Directing leaders to include accountability questions and encouragement to daily Bible reading in the conversation portions of their regular group gatherings will offer opportunity for members to improve in daily Bible reading. In addition, knowing this problem among our people, we will develop training on Bible engagement and interpretation that will be taught on a church-wide level and then repeated for application discussion in missional communities. This, along with providing simple resources, reading plans, and simple Bible interpretation books, will hopefully increase Bible engagement among our members.

A second weakness to address in our church structure through missional communities is what the TDA labeled “Community Engagement.” This section was listed under the various additional items included on the TDA. The data indicated that all respondents indicated strong agreement that it is important for the church to serve the

poor and hurting, and yet only 33 percent of respondents indicated on a later question that they were personally currently involved in ministries or projects that serve non-church members in the community. That means that two-thirds of respondents felt compelled to serve outsiders but were not currently involved whether by personal choice or lack of opportunity. Missional communities are prime avenues to allow every member to be involved in outreach and service to outsiders alongside members of the church.

Another weakness evident in the TDA data was in response to the statement, “I tend to dwell on the same types of sinful thoughts over and over.” In both pre-test and post-test assessments at least two-thirds of respondents agreed somewhat or strongly agreed with that statement. While there was a positive trend from 83.3 percent agreeing in pre-test to 66.6 percent agreeing in post-test, the issue is significant and can easily be addressed in missional communities. In fact, this is another prime example for the need for a close community among church members where enduring care can give way to openness and confession. Knowing this issue from the TDA data, we will be able to give proper emphasis to shared life and confession in the hopes that struggles will be shared and born together.

A final weakness made evident in the TDA’s additional items section was members’ financial giving to the local church. In both pre-test and post-test at least 33 percent indicated that they disagreed with the statement that they regularly give financially to their local church. While it was not the main focus of the study of discipleship and mission in community, financial giving is an indicator of discipleship and maturity. Long-term strategic planning will aim to remedy both a lack in knowledge about a disciple’s need to give and motivation to give by means of preaching schedule and other teaching opportunities.

Initial Stages of Missional Community Planning

The initiation of small groups that facilitated discipleship and mission was underway well before this project began, but earlier attempts to formalize a small group structure had not been successful. The church enjoyed close fellowship with one another outside of worship gatherings but had reached a plateau in space large enough to comfortably meet and needed further training and development of intentional discipleship conversation and missional engagement in their gatherings. The curriculum provided that training and detailed the needed structure for discipleship and mission in community. The long-term planning begins with the initial stages of formalized missional communities.

During the initial stages of curriculum development we identified leaders that were already functioning as leaders in the life of the body and began casting the vision for missional communities. These four men would lead the two pilot groups. Over the course of a number of conversations we shaped the leadership structure of the groups and discussed possible participants and how to divide them into groups. During this process we discussed placement with a number of individuals and decided on composing one group of those who lived geographically near the church building and tended to have been members longer and another group of more recent members who lived outside of a mile from the church building. With groups composed and leaders trained we encouraged them to begin meeting during the fourth of six weeks of training to begin initial discussions and pray for the budding groups. This is where we pick up with establishing long-term strategic priorities, as the groups begin, have been trained, are working with developed leaders, and have clear goals for discipleship and mission. However, the long-term strategic priorities address the first months and years of the group's life, group development and leader training, as well as group multiplication for the next three to five years.

Group Life Priorities and Values

The long-term strategic priority list is built on core values for missional communities. These values include a commitment to covenant membership as the basis of commitment in group life, gospel-centered groups as opposed to those organized by life-stage or shared affinity, and of course the key components of group life as discipleship and mission.

The first value of missional communities is the exercise of covenant membership responsibilities in the narrow focus of a smaller group of members. While every member of the church is committed to the responsibilities of the church covenant by affirmation and signature upon entering membership, missional communities offer a smaller group commitment along the same parameters of the church covenant where more meaningful membership care can be exercised. Therefore, long-term strategy for missional communities begins with a strong pre-membership class to introduce new members to covenant membership as well as consistent teaching and application of covenant principles in life together as members.

The second value of missional communities is that they not be organized around a particular age, stage, or shared likeness among members, but rather as groups of committed members that have the gospel at the core of their common commitment. This also is a conviction that will be shaped primarily by teaching and shepherding, but it will also be implemented as new members are added to groups. Care is taken in the long-term strategy of groups not to drive newly married couples into a group, older couples into another, widows into a separate group, etc., but rather to see diversity and variation among members as they commit to Christ and one another in church membership. As we transition oversight of missional communities to a lay pastor in coming months this core conviction will drive new member placement and dynamics of group multiplication.

A third set of values driving long-term strategic priorities for missional communities is the twin expressions of group life in discipleship and mission. Under the commitment of covenant membership, we express life together under the two goals of

maturing in Christ together in discipleship and serving on the mission of Christ in gospel advance and evangelism. These twin values form the DNA of missional communities and determine long-term planning outcomes.

Group Development and Leader Training

Another aspect of long-term strategic priorities for missional communities is leadership development. This includes both ongoing training of existing leaders as well as recognition, training, and affirmation of emerging leaders. Some of this leadership development occurs in conjunction with our church's elder development training, but since the missional community leadership is not limited to male participants only, the two training programs are not in perfect parallel.

In order to see these priorities and values shape our small group structure we have planned leader training and ongoing group training. The leader training takes place over dinner in our home as we invite group leaders for a meal and conversation about the state of groups, areas to improve, teaching that undergird the values of group life, and prayer. Ongoing group training takes place in quarterly all group gatherings designed to reinforce one aspect of group life through a teaching session led by a pastor or outside expert practitioner. In addition to group and leader training I compiled a list of helpful audio resources, books, and articles and made them available to group leaders and members for ongoing personal study.

Conclusion

In this project I worked to accomplish three goals: (1) assessing the church's understanding and practice of discipleship and mission, (2) developing and teaching a 6-week curriculum to strengthen their understanding and practice of discipleship and mission as a church, and (3) creating long range strategic priorities for organizing small groups in the life of the church for discipleship and mission. The completion of these goals has laid a foundation and a clear path forward for a healthy small group structure

that will cultivate discipleship and missional living. We are grateful to God for his kind providence in this project process and continue to ask for mercy to see his people thrive together in community on mission.

CHAPTER 5
MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary evaluation of this ministry project. It will offer an assessment of the project's purpose and goals as well as examine perceived strengths and weaknesses of the project. The latter half of the chapter will be devoted to addressing weaknesses in content and methodology by offering insight into what would be done differently if given the opportunity, theological reflections on the project, and a number of personal reflections. The chapter closes with a summary conclusion.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a small group structure that cultivates discipleship and missional living at Cherokee Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. This intended purpose was successfully achieved by means of a training curriculum among interested members who began to meet in committed pilot groups thus establishing the structure of small groups with core purposes of discipleship and mission. The success of the project is a testimony to God's gracious leading of his people as they embrace the teaching of the Scriptures regarding discipleship and mission, and their willingness to engage a new structure of small group life in missional communities that intends to support those biblical imperatives for life together in the body. While a few of the pieces were in place for the structure of small groups prior to this project, the project's assessment and curriculum implementation greatly strengthened the formalizing structure of small group life in missional communities. The small group structure in place as a result is positioned for continued effectiveness as a result of the project.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

This project intended to complete its purpose of establishing a small group structure by accomplishing three goals. There was a logical and chronological progression to the goals that allowed each to be successfully completed in a manner that developed toward the next goal, resulting in achieving the intended end of the project and an established small group structure for discipleship and mission. The three goals of the project were (1) to assess the current discipleship, relationship, and missional practices among CBC members, (2) to develop and implement a curriculum for the small groups that lays a basis for the groups moving forward, and (3) to establish a long-term strategic plan to establish, nurture, and multiply discipling and missionally engaged groups.

Goal 1: Assessment

Gaining a starting point in grasping the congregations' understanding and practice of discipleship and mission in community was key to building a curriculum that would help move the body into practicing a particular type of small group ministry. Prior to this project, no formalized structure for small groups existed, but many in the congregation enjoyed an informal small group practice. The first goal of assessing understanding and practice offered insight into content for curriculum in goal two as well as areas to address in long-term planning for goal three.

The TDA is the tool used to measure our people's knowledge and practice; it measured discipleship in eight areas (Bible engagement, obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, building relationships and transparency). LifeWay Research identified these eight areas through a large-scale study in 2011. I chose to use the TDA because it included assessment of the areas of interest for this project: discipleship, mission, and community.

The first goal was successfully completed in the initial stages of the project as the website link, passcode, and instructions were sent to regular attenders of our Core Seminar hour on Sunday mornings who were also the same cross-section of the

congregation that regularly met in smaller groups for meals. Using this group as a pilot for missional communities across the larger body of the church allowed me to engage those already informally practicing many of the things I would advocate and allow use of an already established weekly teaching session for curriculum implementation. The TDA's online format made data collection simple and their tabulation and summary detailed reports of the data made it easy to gain insights from the responses.

Goal 2: Develop and Implement Curriculum

The second goal involved two chronologically overlapping stages. Developing the curriculum began with the research and writing of chapters 1-3 of this project, but it required revision for teaching delivery. These revisions for each of the six sessions began after the TDA assessments but were not completed until a couple of days prior to the delivery of each session of the curriculum. Implementation of the curriculum began April 23, 2017 and ran for six consecutive Sunday mornings.

Developing the curriculum for teaching delivery from the research included drawing out more specific application as we prepared to organize in small groups during and after the curriculum implementation. Chapter 2's exegesis was foundational to establishing the values of membership around the gospel in community for mission, and chapter 3's relevant research from historical and current literature provided ample insight into strategies for success in our particular context.

The peer review panel that reviewed the material consisted of two men I had previously selected and began training to serve as leaders in the two pilot missional communities. These men were selected because they had served as leaders in small group ministries previously, and both were already practicing this type of intentional gospel care for fellow members and missional engagement of neighbors using their home. These review meetings consisted of meeting with them individually after having sent them a review copy of the teaching outline and manuscript. The feedback and insight they

offered was a valuable key to preparing the research for teaching delivery. In particular, as we reviewed session two on the gospel and its ongoing power for the Christian life for maturity and mission, one piece of advice offered altered a section of the teaching content to include a clear articulation of the identity of believers as members of God's family. This insight helped open application through adoption and resulting identity and purpose that the session would have lacked without the peer review. In another instance, reviewing the fifth session on the rhythms of life together in groups, the peer review session clarified planning for initial group meetings and methods of organizing for mission. The lowest scores in the initial curriculum evaluation rubric were on clarity of the points supporting the lesson's thesis, but with the peer reviewers insight I was able to improve clarity and application. These two men served to take the doctoral level research of the second and third chapters and further help me fit it for delivery among the saints of the local church for immediate application. This aspect of curriculum implementation was considered successful as both peer reviewers used the provided curriculum evaluation to score the content as over 90 percent satisfactory.¹

Because I implemented the curriculum in an existing teaching session and did not have to call a special series of meetings attendance was relatively stable. We also recorded the audio from these sessions and made the recordings available to those who missed a week. I intentionally limited the audience for curriculum implementation to a smaller group of existing Core Seminar attendees in order to begin building the small group structure through pilot groups that would help prepare for a wider audience.

During implementation we offered opportunity for questions at the end of most sessions. The questions that were asked showed that generally the attendees were engaged with the material and working to make application to their lives. During implementation I also sought out conversations with attendees outside of the training

¹See appendix 3 for curriculum evaluation rubric.

session. Sometimes over lunch out or dinner in our home I was able to answer questions and reinforce the material and the larger plan in the life of the church for missional communities.

Goal 3: Strategic Priorities

The third and final goal of establishing long-term strategic priorities for missional communities in the life of our church is probably the most pivotal goal to the project's ongoing success. It aimed to determine these priorities in order to establish, nurture, and multiply discipling and missionally engaged groups. An accomplished curriculum will not guarantee long-term success, but a list of strategic priorities can make up for insufficiencies in curriculum and other areas and setup for effective group life in the future. The long-term priorities I have developed included editing the curriculum for future delivery in-group training, schedule ongoing group training, develop leader training procedures, and compile resources for personal study and development of leaders and members. The third goal was measured by the development of a strategic priorities list. It is measured successful by completion of the list and as it was approved in assessment by a member of the church's pastoral staff and two elder candidates currently serving as missional community leaders.² The feedback these reviewers offered strengthened the document by adding insight to implementation of my suggested four priorities. For instance, as we plan for group multiplication one existing group leader mentioned considering the availability and need for hosting a group on a particular night of the week and how that might involve more members. Another suggestion regarding ongoing training stressed the need for leaders to be trained as shepherds capable of identifying needs among members and offering individualized care as group members evidence need.

²See appendix 4 for the strategic priorities document.

Strengths of the Project

The most enjoyable strength of this project was equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:12). It brought no small pastoral delight to analyze the data and verify that the members who participated in the training were praying more often for non-Christians, inviting them to experience the church, and sharing the gospel with them more than they were previously. Because the project laid a foundation of gospel care for maturity and mission in community, the training will continue to be applied as the small groups meet with renewed vision for their purpose and strategy, which will hopefully result in further maturity and evangelism evident in the post-test data among participants.

A second strength of the project relates to its execution in the life of our particular local church. There are a few good books establishing missional communities and many more on small group structures, but we did not need a universalized approach. Tailoring the training based on the exegetical and current literature research allowed it to move a particular people into practice in a small group structure that fit both the people and the goals of maturity and mission. Similarly, this project sought to codify an existing informal structure into a formal structure, and therefore was not seeking to build a ground-up structure. It was made stronger by our people's existing practices of community and mission. Had I introduced this research and proposal in the life of our church as little as three years ago it is very likely it would have been unsuccessful in establishing this type of small group ministry. However, since the people and culture of our church has changed it was much easier moving some existing practices into a formal small group structure for more clarity and intentionality.

The project was strengthened in some respects by use of the TDA assessment. The TDA exposed some of my faulty assumptions about our members' Bible engagement. If it had not been for the data from the TDA I would not have identified that area of discipleship as needing attention. The TDA also reinforced some assumptions about our people's life together in community. When the data showed that all members' agreed with the statement that they have developed significant relationships within the

church it proved what I thought to be true about our community life.

Finally, the curriculum at the center of this project provided a strong start to the small group structure I proposed. These training sessions will serve as more than just this initial foundation in the life of missional communities, but is easily adapted into ongoing group training and prepared for new group launch training. The strength inherent in the curriculum itself, in my opinion, is a strong connection between ecclesiology and mission. Missional communities in our body are not a one-for-one parallel with other churches employing small groups by the same name. Instead, the intention was to drive meaningful church membership and covenant commitment into more narrow groups of members for discipleship and mission. This connection between membership and mission is not emphasized in the literature I have reviewed; therefore, this project's curriculum sought to bridge that gap.

Weaknesses of the Project

The principle weakness of the project was undoubtedly the architect. The personal period of adjustment to our family's sudden adoption of newborn twins in the initial week of the project contributed to some lack of preparedness and sleep. For this reason, without any false humility, I can claim personal responsibilities for all shortcomings and attribute all strengths of the project to God's grace.

While some aspects of the TDA offered strength to the project, it also hindered data collection in significant ways. Because of the breadth of its assessment and measuring some areas that were not of particular interest to the project, I feel we likely lost some accuracy, as respondents may have been tempted to move quickly through the more than eighty questions. Also, using the same lengthy assessment for both pre-test and post-test data collection made it difficult to get some participants to respond to repeated requests and complete the assessment a second time. In the first round of pre-test assessments, we requested seventeen people complete the assessment and twelve did so successfully. In the second round we asked all twelve to complete it a second time and

nine people agreed to do so despite multiple reminders and prompts. The Lifeway staff for the TDA were very helpful and quick to respond to requests for assistance through the process, but we did find some errors in the website that prevented at least one respondent from completing the pre-test assessment.

Another weakness discovered during implementation was the timing of the launch of pilot group meetings. I encouraged the two groups we recognized to begin meeting to pray and discuss the teaching session material. After the second week I realized that there was some confusion forming on some of the details of missional engagement. The problem was that the curriculum content through the first four weeks was heavily doctrinal and sought to establish the structure of groups with exegesis, but did not adequately address some practical issues until the final two weeks. Since the groups starting meeting before we got to those final weeks we ran into some differing opinions on group practice before we were able to set out a particular vision. This weakness will be addressed in future delivery of these training sessions by introducing practical elements earlier in the curriculum.

A final weakness in project implementation was our leader development plan. By God's grace it was easy to identify leaders who were already practicing discipleship and mission in community and appeared capable of leading others, but schedules did not permit gathering as a group of leaders for training prior to establishing the groups. I met individually with the leaders and each was a part of our elder training session at that time, but when I attempted to setup a period of training we could not find a common time to meet. In the future, I will address this weakness through a leader-training plan that is able to identify leaders through the existing group structure and will make it easier to see that they share a common vision.

What I Would do Differently

Upon reflection, there are a few things I would do differently over the course of the project if given the opportunity. In choosing to implement the curriculum with a

subsection of the congregation and begin with two pilot groups we did not make the structural change in small groups known to all members. I did this intentionally because this group was already regularly gathering on Sunday nights for a meal and welcoming newcomers and unbelievers. Therefore, it made sense to make this transition among those already practicing informally what I intended to formalize in a small group structure. However, as the pilot groups began meeting there were some who found out about the groups and felt left out and uninformed. If I were implementing again I would remedy this problem by making the church aware of the pilot groups, casting a broader invitation into the training sessions, and detailing the vision of the groups during an announcement session in Sunday worship gathering.

A second failure I wish I could fix in retrospect is my failure to return to my research methodology proposal and proceed with planned expert panel review. In the period of curriculum development and implementation I opted for a peer review panel for various reasons, one of which was a failure to carefully follow my earlier proposal. Despite this oversight I believe the peer review model of two potential group leaders provided helpful constructive feedback that tailored the research for presentation in our church. The strength of the peer review process was the reviewers' knowledge of the church and individuals who were participating in group life. The peer review helped the structure for groups conform to both biblical standards and the people who would begin meeting together in missional communities.

In the final analysis, rather than use the TDA I should have developed an assessment that more closely fit the data I needed to collect for proper measurements. The TDA measured a broader spectrum of discipleship categories than this project was concerned with, and this larger scope meant an 80 plus question assessment that participants were asked to complete twice. This resulted in fewer completed assessments and a decrease from 12 assessments in pre-test to 9 assessments in post-test. A custom measurement tool would have provided more consistent, clearer data to inform the

curriculum preparation and results.

Theological Reflections

The research for chapter 2 followed a three-part outline that built one argument: God sanctifies his people through the gospel in community for mission. These three elements are not a comprehensive explanation of the Christian life, but rather serve as helpful categories for a simple means of life together on Christ seeking to spread his glory in the great commission. As I implemented the curriculum for the project I also preached a topical series in Sunday morning worship that coincided with these categories. In that season we saw some significant evidences of grace in renewed repentance among God's people and good questions from unbelievers who were a part of some of those worship gatherings. Our people seemed to embrace these three elements of walking with Christ, clinging together to the gospel in community for mission, and we saw comforting and encouraging signs of God at work among his people.

On a personal level, the research work for both chapters 2 and 3 set valuable patterns in my thinking and practice. There is much more to be said about sanctification and Christian maturity than just returning to the gospel, but this foundation coupled with the arena of Christian community for discipleship has given me deeper satisfaction in the gospel of Christ and a more profound thankfulness for God's continued work in the church.

One unique contribution to this research is the connection between meaningful church membership and a missional small group structure. In my reading I did not find any literature connecting a covenant commitment to mutual care and discipleship and a small group structure that facilitated exercise of gospel-centered discipleship and provoked missional engagement of neighbors and neighborhoods. Exploring these connections seemed to empower our people to love one another deeply with genuine care in hospitality and transparency with an end in the spread of the gospel as we invite others near to see our love for one another and accompany that love with evangelism.

Personal Reflections

As a young pastor I already need more than my two hands to count the hasty and poorly planned changes I have made in the church. I am grateful for the methodical process this project forced me to walk through to establish this small group structure. The counsel from peer students and supervisors enriched this process for our church in immeasurable ways.

This research was the most extensive research I have done on the mission of God and I believe the effects on my understanding of the purposes of God in the world through his people will shape my ministry in the future. The theological connections gained between ecclesiology and missiology will benefit more than just our small group structure. The ongoing fruit of this research will hopefully extend for years in my local church ministry.

When we began the period of project implementation we knew it would be a busy season with some ongoing transitions in church-life that required special care and that it would coincide with reading and preparation for Applied Empirical Research seminar. Just a few days into our planned start, however, our plans were dramatically changed by a phone call at 9:00 a.m. on a Monday morning that led to us bringing home our newly adopted twin daughters less than six hours later. The joyful chaos of the following months caused us to rely on God's strength and rest fully on his gracious promises of security in the gospel. God was gracious to carry us through this busy season with joy in him, delight in our family, and increased love for and from our church family.

Conclusion

Overall, this project is a success in my estimation in its stated purpose and goals and in what I perceive to be the long-term impact on my ministry and our church family. As God continues his work in our body through the gospel, believed and applied in community for mission we will continue to reap the benefits of the research and curriculum developed for this project. As we address deficiencies highlighted by the

TDA in ongoing training, as we continue to strengthen leaders, and as we press on to see the gospel spread through the ordinary expression of our life together we will count ourselves grateful for the work of this project.

APPENDIX 1
TRANSFORMATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP
ASSESSMENT

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Each of the following questions contains a group of choices; select the one that best describes you. *While responding, keep your focus on your current attitudes and behavior.*

1. During difficult circumstances, I sometimes doubt that God loves me and will provide for my life.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

2. I feel comfortable that I can share my belief in Christ to someone else effectively.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3. A Christian must learn to deny himself/ herself in order to serve Christ.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

4. I expect my Christian friends to challenge me if I make unwise choices.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

5. I am hesitant to let others know that I am a Christian.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

6. I desire to please and honor Jesus in all that I do.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

7. I believe that God has a purpose for all events in my life, regardless of whether I perceive each event as being good or bad.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

8. I have developed significant relationships with people at my church.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

9. Often during the worship part of the church service (singing or prayer), I find myself just "going through the motions."

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

10. When I sing at church, my thoughts are usually focused right on God.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

11. If I go several days without reading the Bible I find myself unfulfilled.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

12. I am open to working in any job God wants me to have.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

13. I feel sorrow and regret when I realize I have sinned.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14. I sometimes doubt that God can change the lives of non-Christians I know.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. I believe one of the best ways to get to know others in the church is to serve with them.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16. I try to avoid situations in which I might be tempted to think or do immoral things.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

17. I am open to helping anyone God wants me to help.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

18. When things happen that I can't explain, I typically doubt that God was involved.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

19. I regularly use my gifts and talents to serve / help people in need who are not part of my church.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

20. While interacting with others on a normal, daily basis, I seek opportunities to speak out about Jesus Christ.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

21. Reading and studying the Bible has not made significant changes in the way that I live my life.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

22. I am intentionally putting my spiritual gift(s) to use serving God and others.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

23. Throughout the day I find myself thinking about biblical truths.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

24. When convinced of sin in my life, I readily confess it to God as sin.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

25. I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

26. I often express praise and thanksgiving to God for who He is and for what He has done.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

27. I intentionally make time in my schedule to fellowship and interact with other believers.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

28. Spiritual matters do not tend to come up as a normal part of my daily conversations with other Christians.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

29. I intentionally give up certain purchases so I can use that money for others.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

30. I find myself praying at the spur-of-the-moment throughout the day.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

31. I intentionally spend time with other believers in order to help them grow in their faith.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

32. I regularly find myself meeting a need without being asked.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

33. I have made a serious attempt to discover God's will for my life.

- Strongly Agree

- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

34. I am open and responsive to those in my church who teach the Bible.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

35. Many people who know me are not aware that I am a Christian.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

36. With reference to my values and priorities, I can honestly say that I try to put God first in my life.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

37. I express praise and gratitude to God even in difficult circumstances.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree

- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

38. I am generally a different person in public than I am in private.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

39. I intentionally try to get to know new people I meet at church.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

40. When I realize that I have a choice between "my way" and "God's way", I usually choose my way.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

41. I intentionally try to serve people outside my church who have tangible needs.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

42. One of the main reasons I live my life the way I do is to please and honor God.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

43. When I realize my attitude does not please God, I take steps to try and fix it.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

44. I openly share about difficulties I am experiencing when I talk with Christian friends.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

45. I hesitate to share with Christian friends about my own doubts and spiritual struggles.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

46. God is just and sin has to be punished.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

47. If a person is sincerely seeking God, he / she can obtain eternal life through religions other than Christianity.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

48. The Holy Spirit is at work in every believer teaching, convicting of sin, and guiding.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

49. Jesus was a sinner just like us.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

50. Jesus died on the cross and was physically resurrected from the dead.

- Strongly Agree

- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

51. The fruit of the Spirit (love, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, etc.) is evidence of a genuine relationship with God.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

52. I have a personal responsibility to share my religious beliefs about Jesus Christ with non-Christians.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

53. The Bible is the written Word of God and is totally accurate in all that it teaches.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

54. Satan is a real being, not just a symbol of evil.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree

- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

55. The God of the Bible is no different from the gods or spiritual beings depicted by world religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

56. My Christian faith is very important in my life today.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

57. Eternal salvation is possible through God's grace alone; nothing we do can earn salvation.

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

58. About how often, if at all, do you personally read the Bible? *Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.*

- Every day
- A few times a week

- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Rarely/ Never

59. About how often, if at all, do you personally study the Bible (more in-depth than just reading it)? *Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.*

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Rarely/ Never

60. About how often, if at all, do you personally set aside time for prayer of any kind? *Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.*

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Rarely/ Never

61. About how often, if at all, do you personally set aside time for private worship, praise, or thanksgiving to God? *Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.*

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Rarely/ Never

62. About how often, if at all, do you personally pray in a group with other Christians? *Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.*

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Rarely/ Never

63. About how often, if at all, do you personally confess your sins and wrongdoings to God and ask for forgiveness? *Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.*

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Rarely/ Never

64. About how often, if at all, do you personally pray for the spiritual status of people you know who are not professing Christians? *Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.*

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Rarely/ Never

65. In a typical month, about how many times (if any) do you attend small classes or groups for adults at church such as Sunday school, Bible study, small groups, Adult Bible

Fellowships, etc?

- 4 or more
- 3
- 2
- 1
- Zero

66. In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, shared with someone how to become a Christian?

- 10 or more times
- 6-9 times
- 3-5 times
- 1-2 times
- Zero

67. In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, invited an unchurched person to attend a church service or some other program at your church?

- 10 or more times
- 6-9 times
- 3-5 times
- 1-2 times
- Zero

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Small Group Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lesson # _____ Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary N/A=Not Applicable					
Criteria					Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of biblical community.					
The material clearly defines and applies some aspect of the gospel.					
The material is biblically and theologically sound.					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION TEACHING
MANUSCRIPTS

The six sessions of curriculum developed for this project were delivered between April 23, 2017 and May 28, 2017. Teaching manuscripts were prepared for delivery during each session. These manuscripts are not word-for-word accounts of the material delivered, but represent mostly full sentence and memory prompts to that aided me in teaching the material. The six teaching manuscripts are included below. Note that each sentence or memory prompt is left justified because that is how I structure teaching manuscripts for easy delivery.

Week 1 – Introduction to Missional Communities

I think when we look back on what HS used to revive our church it will not be preaching/ programs: It will be ordinary meals.

So much good has been done around our dinner tables and living rooms.

I cannot tell you how thrilled I am at the work of the Spirit of God in our church.

To watch discipleship spreading wide in a new church culture.

People spending time together and caring for one another. Genuine family love. Its amazing.

And every 4 months I will think - alright let's organize this a little better.

And I will spend a week brainstorming/reading/praying and then do very little.

Little things will be tweaked, but nothing major.

I do not want to mess up what is going on so well organically.

But we do need a clearer structure, organization that I think can be added w/o losing the benefits of the informal and organic we now enjoy.

If I planted a vine in the middle of my backyard.

It would grow wherever it wanted to

It would grow unchecked if it had water and sun, but it would grow faster and look better if I built a trellis on which it could grow and flourish.

MCs are the trellis structure for the vine of the church to grow.

I think nows the time for some clear organization. For a couple reasons:

First, and best of all, it is a shift in response to who we are.

(handout: THIS IS US.)

We are not trying to make ourselves a family on mission.

We are shifting to support the way that God has already formed us into a family on mission.

The last 3 years in our church life have seen a necessary generational shift.

In 2014: median age: 73, avg age of attendee was 66. Life expectancy was short. 13 funerals.

But in those 3 years God has built on a foundation of long time members who love his glory...

And he's sent new faces, new families whose hearts beat for his glory to be enjoyed and spread.

So this is a structure around the work God is doing here.

The second reason for this timing is that we need to change to engage our neighbors.

(handout: THIS IS OUR NEIGHBOR.)

Our neighborhood has changed - not the first time in history of our church.

In 1979 we merged w/ Glenn Park Baptist. In early 2000s they merged w/ Bev Hills/Southland

All on account of neighborhood demographics changing.

Now: our neighborhood has changed by growing dramatically younger.

In the mile around our bldg, of the 7,771 people - the highest percentage of any age group is 25-29, almost 10 percent. Next highest? 30-34. Almost 40 percent of total population between 25-55.

The most populated grouping under 18? The 0-4 age group.

Our area is filled w/ young families, with young children.

So our city is a different mission field than it was when Cherokee moved into this 'hood in '79.

And the timing is right for a shift in our approach as a church.

So slowly over last 3 years: shift from attractional, *come and see*, church.

To an attractional, *there is room for you*, community.

A shift from expecting unbelievers to come to us.

To expecting each of us to go together in community on mission to them.

Goal over next few weeks: introduce a new way for us to mature together for mission

together.

Something we are already doing - but giving it structure and support to do it better.

So what are we proposing are committed missional community groups that help us live together *as a family on mission*. - both aspects are vital (FAMILY/MISSION)

Calling them MCs communicates the twin purposes of community/family and mission.

Communities living on Christ together for maturity and mission.

And today I want us to see that this is a natural extension of our covenant life together.

Again - beauty is that this is not a 180 degree shift for most of us.

This is taking what we are doing in large group meals, in smaller dinners w/ neighbors/friends and committing to continue to get better at it as a family.

So as we start laying foundation, I want to spend some time taking about the benefits that will come as we fertilize and prune the vine that is growing in our church right now.

What do we stand to benefit from MCs?

(1) a better way to be church for one another and (2) A better way to engage on mission.

(1) A better way to be church together.

Lets take a minute to look at God's formulation for his people in 1 Peter 1:22 - 2:5
Peter writes to persecuted and suffering Xians and reminds them of their position, identity, and labor for X.

You've been born again, he says - read 1:22-25

Born again thru the living word of good news in the gospel.

Therefore, put away the things of the old life - 2:1-3

And come together as a family of God, a house of many bricks, to be a people in whom his glory dwells

You, chosen people, are to spread his glory TOGETHER - 2:9

B/c you're his people, you're members of his family - 2:10

When God draws us from our sin in the darkness to new birth and life in the light.

He calls us into a new family.

With a new Father, new brothers/sisters, new purpose for living.

The church is an assembly, a gathered people; but it is not an assembly/meeting.

Church is not portrayed in the NT as an event, but a people - a family.

When we "go to church" we don't go to a meeting/bldg/event - we go to a people.

Church membership is life together as a family, not a Costco membership of benefits for cost

A family. A family with expectations for family life together.

How do we know what that life together looks like?

When you join a church, how can you know what commitment you're making? And who are you making that commitment to?

We organize our family around our church covenant - bc its a biblical idea found in 1 Timothy. Negative.

Gregg Allison, professor at SBTS, says earliest covenant evidence is Schleithem Confession (1527) and it shows up early in Baptist life in 1610/1611 w/ John Smyth as he defines the church as: *"saints joined together by covenant with God and themselves, freely to use all the holy things of God, according to the Word, for their mutual edification and God's glory."*

Instead, we organize around a church covenant for practical reasons more than biblical. The biblical reasons are there, but the covenant helps us commit to them w/ practicality.

We could just say: join our church and commit to follow X together, but w/o some precision over what we mean confusion will reign and expectations won't be met. So that rather than saying, when you join our church you commit to 1 Cor 13 love, Phil 2 humility, Heb 10 gathering to stir, Rom 12 gentleness...

We summarize the teaching of the NT regarding life together in one document. It helps us have clear expectations and gives us a baseline for membership/discipline.

The rub comes when we try and exercise this genuine love, humility, gentleness, stirring, meeting, and discipleship w/ a hundred people.

Nearly impossible to know and keep up w/ that many folks at the same time.

I wonder if anyone in our church could sit down w/ a blank picture directory and fill in every page.

So MCs give us a bite-size portion of the whole to commit to and care for.

The MC is a smaller committed body of followers of X (from within the church) living together on the gospel for mission.

It is basically a smaller church. A subsection.

It does not negate your responsibility to all - but it ensures the all can receive the better discipleship into maturity and a better opportunity for mission.

If you've been a Xian for a while you've seen, been apart of, or heard of various types of groups within the larger church.

This is not a small group. Home group. Discipleship group. Community group.

This is not a Bible study. Not group counseling.

Not another blip on the church calendar.

Not another appointment.

This is a commitment to a people, not a meeting.
It might be like a small group, but small groups typically commit just to a get-together.
MCs are smaller avenues for you to express your covenant commitment in membership.
So you commit to the people of your group, not just gathering w/ a group.

2) Secondly: MCs are a better way to engage in the mission of God.

God creates a world to fill w/ his glory, he created all things good.
In the fall we embraced the desire to spread sin and fellow little sinners instead of God's glory.
But God is fulfilling his promise to fill the earth w/ his glory now as thru the gospel...
He reconciles rebels and brings them into little new creation communities.
And one day soon he will make all things new and the earth will be filled with his glory.
Until that day, he's left us to spread this news of redemption and call others to repent and believe.
This is the mission of God, spreading his glory.
And we are participants in that mission, left to ask him, "HOW?"

MCs offer us a better way to be employed together on the mission of God.

A 2009 Easter edition of Newsweek magazine announced insight into "The Decline and Fall of Christian America" with their title story.
It noted the number of adults in US who do not attend church nearly doubled from 1991-2009.
3,500 US churches closed annually and attendance was declining in 80 percent of remaining churches.
NAMB estimates that SBC closes 17 churches per week; almost 900 a year.

Its easy for those things to discourage people who love Jesus and love his church.
But when we see the rise of secularism in our culture it does not mean that Xianity is dying.
It means that nominal, unregenerate Christianity is dying.
The opposite of secularism is not vital Xianity.
It is not as if we are sliding out of genuine revival.
We are sliding out of a Christendom of outward morality and inward depravity.

It means that it is no longer socially advantageous to be called a Xian.
Social circles have expanded beyond church fellowship halls.
And folks who used to go on Sundays, "Because its what you do" no longer feel compelled.

Why is it not a bad thing that churches are closing? That attendance is dropping?
B/c the demise of nominal Xianity gives the gospel a powerful backdrop to shine

brightly.

As the facade falls away, genuine Xianity perseveres.

So what does God use to bring people to himself? The church.

Not the church of programmatic outreach.

But the church family as a display of the gospel's power.

God uses a compelling community living out a compelling gospel. A people committed to X and one another who display and declare the welcoming news of Jesus.

In a 2006 lecture titled, "The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World," (look it up)

Tim Keller says people no longer have the theological furniture they once had.

It used to be that folks were reared w/ some Xian values and knowledge of basic doctrines.

You could engage them over the nature of God, sin, etc.

They had some of the furniture they needed, they just needed help arranging it in the room.

So most of the work of Xian ministry was rearranging the furniture for people, helping them understand their place in God's world and in X's redemption.

But that "Christ-haunted" worldview furniture is more and more absent in the minds of our neighbors.

I have heard multiple stories of shocked VBS workers — "I can not believe they had never heard of Jesus" "They could not find Genesis 1" "They had never seen a cross before" etc

People don't have the furniture, so it doesn't make any sense for us to cling to the same programming, means of church that just seeks to rearrange that furniture.

We can not expect them to come for our expert rearranging services - to realize they need the help of an interior decorator.

Instead, we go to them in the ordinary stuff of daily life.

And as we go, we go in a maturing community that can display the redemption of God in better/better ways.

So our long term shift as a church is one from attractional events to become an attractional community.

To engage our neighbors, we won't try and get them to come and be interested in a church program in a church bldg, but to go to them and invite them to see and hear the gospel in community.

People need to see the difference in biblical Christianity.

They need to see a better family to hear a better story.

A bldg w/ programs doesn't tell a better story - it hints for them to clean up and come worthy.

But when we make grace visible in a family of love we display and declare the gospel better.

And the beauty of God's plan to work this out in a local church is good news to weary saints.

That he would use introverts/extroverts in the same community...

So that the mouth speaking and hand serving and foot that going all connect to one another.

In moving from attractional events to attractional community it means that every member joins.

It is not uncommon for us to think of missions as going or giving.

We don't all go, but we can all stay on purpose.

We can all be intentional about gospel ministry w/ week in whatever vocation, avenue we have.

We can live w/ gospel intentionality in the everyday stuff of life and display/declare the gospel to those far from God.

As we do, we need a family.

We need supporters, encouragers, co-laborers, helpers, "fill in the gap"ers.

We as eye, ear, hand need the rest of the body for full function.

And missional communities will help us cultivate diverse, gospel-focused families that will mature us together for mission.

So we have a better way to BE church and a better way to be on the MISSION of God.

And these twin purposes of our life together in maturity and mission go hand in hand..

Our loving maturity together is a display of the gospel.

Our loving maturity together equips us to declare the gospel.

All in the same avenue of Missional Communities.

As we make the church an identity we share, more than a responsibility we juggle - we are disciplined and make disciples better.

So let me preview the next few weeks -

We'll walk thru the core aspects of MCs in the GOSPEL, in COMMUNITY, for MISSION

Then think thru family life rhythms of MCs and the practicalities of leadership, etc.

And if we can start gathering next week on Sun night to discuss we will be helped get going.

In a way I pray all of this is gloriously underwhelming.

I hope you think: come on man, give me more. Let's do this already!

Bc We have got folks in all diff places and practices of life together we want to start at a

baseline foundation.

So I hope you're underwhelmed, not overwhelmed.

But this is our foundation, we are digging the footing, the cement truck has dumped its load, and we are smoothing it out to make a sturdy home for years to come.

Week 2 - Gospel Commitment

Intro: brief review of session 1- small group/narrow commitment - life together in covenant care

Yesterday in Bargain hunt - Luke sad to not get what he wants. Weeping off and on.

Lady comes up and rebukes us.

I could not help but wonder after she left - what did she aim to accomplish?

Was her goal to help us? To help our kid?

As we think more this week about Missional Communities - I want us to have a clearer, better goal in our commitment - a clear way of thinking about how we will help one another.

As we went thru intro last week - your brain may want to lump MCs into small group category

And that's ok, but remember: committed to members/people, not just a meeting.

Small groups organize around any number of things - typically age/stage/affinity.

So you'll have groups for singles, young marrieds, divorcees, stay at home moms, etc.

These aren't sinful small groups, they are just limited.

The body of X is full of a variety of gifts among her people.

And the best mix of that is a diverse mix for diversity of gifts.

So we don't organize around socio-economic status, profession, stage of life -

We organize around the **GOSPEL** in a diverse family.

So MCs are of first priority: gospel-centered communities.

And we make this gospel commitment bc the work of X is central to the twin purposes: maturity/mission

How we understand the impact of the work of X influences what we do w/ it as Xians.

If we think of X's work as only the starting point into a new Xian life of development divorced from the gospel, then we have what author James Wilhoit calls a "pre-discipleship gospel."

A "pre-discipleship gospel" sees the work of X as "merely the door by which we enter Xianity."

A pre-discipleship gospel is: "*God saved me (gospel); now I need to make myself holy (discipleship).*"

The gospel, however, both justifies and renews.

So it must be more than the message proclaimed to those far from X; its those in X as

well.

So then our commitment for maturity is a gospel commitment.

Its aim is that we each see/grow in our understanding/application of the gospel.

Two sections of Colossians today: **Col 1:21-23/2:6-7** [COLOSSIANS INTRO]

Some among church Paul addresses in Col are questioning X's sufficiency for their spiritual life/progress.

Confusion over the means and method of their going on in Xian life.

So Paul prays (**1:9-10**), *"that [they] may be filled w/ the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."*

He wants them mature and bearing fruit - and so he gives X to these Xians.

(**1:28**) *"[X] we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone w/ all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in X."*

This is in opposition to *"philosophy and empty deceit, and human traditions"* that some are using

They seek to add to X by laying out dietary regulations, festival days that must be kept (**2:16; 20-23**).

They *"insist on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up w/o reason by sensuous minds"* (**2:18**)

And so Paul's goal in Col. is to hold out X as sufficient for the believers' maturity. (**3:1-4**)

a - 1:21-23 We continue in X crucified.

As he moves on from a span of 6 verses (1:15-20) w/ 12 explicit references to Jesus

X...1:21 begins w/ a second person plural indicating a transition.

He describes X as God incarnate, preeminent reconciler and redeemer... then he turns to their former state: *"alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds"* (ESV).

Undeserving and undesirable people have been reconciled to the holy God by means of the righteous life and atoning death of Jesus (verse 22).

The transition in Col 1:21 is called a *"divine reversal"*

Paul picks up theme of God's redemption in X of Col. 1:20 and now turns to apply it to our sin.

This redemptive transformation has come (1:22) *"in [X's] body of flesh by his death."*

As a penal substitute for his people, the broken body of X absorbs the wrath that hostile-minded, evil-doing people deserve.

In this way, he is able to present them blameless and free from sin.

This penal substitution of X's body of flesh broken to cleanse is the heart of the gospel.

His aim in reminding them of the gospel is that they would find it sufficient for their life and godliness contrary to the false teaching to find hope elsewhere (2:3-4, 8-15).

Paul makes this imperative explicit in verse 23 through the use of a conditional clause; You will be made holy through X's penal substitution if you hold fast to the gospel.[17]

"if indeed you continue in the faith..."

W/ this warning for Xians he wants to steer them to enduring faith thru the hope of the gospel.

Nothing in the Xian life, he warns them, is to be divorced from the hope of the gospel.

The gospel is the news that continues to renew the Xian.

We continue in it, not shifting from its hope, but seeing more application of its hope in our lives

You see the same thing in 2:6-7 We walk in the gospel We have received

Paul is directing us to cont living on X in the same way we initially began living on him in repentance and faith at conversion.

The way of perseverance and maturity in X is to continue in the gospel.

To cont repenting and walking away from sin.

And to cont believing and casting ourselves on X.

Continue to walk in Jesus, just as you stepped into him at conversion.

How does the gospel mature us? Look further down in Colossians to chapter 3.

The gospel matures us by giving us a new identity, ongoing power, and X's example:

1-4. The gospel gives us a new identity as raised living sons and daughters of God. With new identity comes new role, purpose.

5-11. The gospel gives us power to kill sin and obey X. In X we die to sin, and continue to kill in dwelling sin. The gospel is the power to continue to run from sin and believe we will have a welcome reception from God in our repentance.

12-17. The gospel gives us an example, model for living like X. Humility, love, forgiveness, patience - all most beautifully displayed in the gospel.

How does the gospel mature us? New identity. Ongoing power. Unparalleled example. Notice how this gospel maturity bends into the body and community life . . .

3:12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

3:13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Each of these characteristics is interpersonal. Compassion. Kindness. Forgiveness. Love.
3:14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

3:15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body...

3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...

This maturity that the new gospel identity works in new gospel power is a communal identity.

The committed family life of the church, but esp smaller group of MC, is ideal place for this gospeling to take place.

As we think about how this gospel renewal fleshes itself out in the life of the church, and MC in particular:

3 things we need to know and cont to be reminded of . . .

Richard Lovelace (*Dynamics of Spiritual Life*) argues for 3 elements of ongoing gospel renewal:

- (1) awareness of God's holiness,
- (2) the depth and depravity of sin, and
- (3) the sufficiency of the atoning work of Jesus to bring us to God forever.

This embrace of the gospel, Lovelace argues, should happen "*not just at the outset of their Christian lives but in every succeeding day.*"

Every day we need to know Gods holiness

Every day we need a deeper, real-er, understanding of our sin, depravity

And out of that understanding a daily application of the work of Jesus X

All of which happens best in the context of a people who know us well and love us well.

To grow in our awareness of God, our sin, and the gospel we need a people w/ us in close proximity.

Its easy to think we are growing in X-likeness when we are not dealing w/ sinful people and sinful situations like X dealt with.

In isolation, we can think ourselves pretty holy.

But committed missional communities position us for gospel renewal as they give us opportunity to live in transparent proximity w/ fellow saints who can help us see the things necessary for gospel renewal: thoroughness of our depravity, the holiness of God, and the welcome of the gospel to return to God.

MCs foster this gospel renewal thru . . .

-- The **regularity** of our life together helps us gospel one another well.

Very simply: we get more opportunities to know, love, and speak as we have regular rhythms of togetherness.

A family lives together.

And thereby a family knows each other well.

-- The **intimacy** of our life together helps us gospel one another well.

Anyone's kid have a birthmark? You know where it is, right? Bc you intimately know that kid.

You've bathed that kid, you've been swimming w/ that kid, you've lived w/ that kid for a long time.

The more we are together, the more we live like a family, the more intimacy we cultivate.

-- Similarly- the **informality** of our life together helps us gospel one another well - we see more than just the "church version" of us. We see stubbed toes, disobedient fit throwing children, disappointed. Dejected. We see it all. And it positions us to gospel well. To speak the sufficiency of X to one another.

-- The **longevity** of our life together helps us gospel one another well. This commitment is a revolving group. It's a lasting commitment. Imagine the fruit born over 10 years of life together, knowing each other, serving w one another.

Bc over the long haul of regular life together we build trust.

We come to actually believe that others love us as they demonstrate patience, kindness, care for us over months and years.

So the intimate care that develops in the extended family of an MC is able to speak truth from a foundation of love.

And we can gospel one another b/c we know one another.

And we can listen as others speak b/c we know they are for us, they are with us, and they care.

One of the most exciting things to me is what God might do in us over the next two decades together.

Knowing the shortfalls, needs, common temptations of others that we can speak to.

Knowing the ups, downs, trials.

Walking thru loss together and joys together.

This benefit and joy will come at a cost:

What do we bring to the table for gospel renewal in community?

-- Gospel renewal in community requires personal **openness/transparency** - all of our lives, families, selves must be opened and spoken into. (Gal. 6:1-2)

The sin we hide is the sin our community can not speak into.

-- Gospel renewal in community requires our **gentleness, meekness, humility, meekness, forgiveness** (Col 3:12-16)

Vulnerability and transparency will die in a harsh environment.

-- Gospel renewal in community requires **bold, caring speaking the gospel in love** to fellow saints we are committed to. (Eph 4:11-16)

To see this gospel culture flourish in the extended family of the MC we need (acc to Ray Ortlund:

Plenty of the gospel, safety to be ourselves, and time to transform.

MCs deliver all 3 in a small community.

RAY ORTLUND SUMMARIZES THIS NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY, GENTLENESS AND GOSPEL:

"The family of God is where people should find lots of gospel, lots of safety, and lots of time. In other words, the people in our churches need:

-- multiple exposures to the happy news of the gospel from one end of the Bible to the other;

-- the safety of non-accusing sympathy so that they can admit their problems honestly; and

-- enough time to rethink their lives at a deep level, because people are complex and changing is not easy." (Ray Ortlund, The Gospel, p. 72)

The gospel transforms us in a safe committed community over the long haul.

We don't mature as orphans struggling to make it on our own. But as family members.

Week 3 – Maturing in Community

INTRO: In my 2am feeding times I have worked my way thru most of Swamp People and caught up on Designated Survivor, so I was flipping around looking the other night. Found a show called Alone on History Channel. The premise: 10 contestants survive alone in Patagonia for as long as possible.

I thought about that show as I was reviewing these notes - b/c we can think of our spiritual lives in the same scenario. We can think that God saves us and puts us in a hostile world, dropping us back among sinners And he's given us 10 items we need to survive, but we go at it alone

But that's not it, rather than dropping us off alone, God saves us and places us a family Where we have big brothers/sisters who show us how to walk and please the Father

Picking up this week where we left off last week. Last week we walked thru Colossians

to see sufficiency of X for Xian life This week I want us to see this gospel renewal happening in a committed community. The narrow commitment of the smaller group serves as a more effective avenue for ongoing, intentional soul-care and mission accountability, encouragement, support, team-work.

Now all that we will cover is true of broader church membership . . . We are just saying it can happen more effectively in a more narrowly focused group. 3 things I want us to see about family life shaped by the gospel today:

(1) A gospel community will provoke you - Heb 10

Hebrews 10:19–25 (ESV) - look first at verse 24 . . . The stirring up commanded here comes thru a word that usually carries negative connotation. It occurs twice in NT, here and Acts 15:39 describing the “*sharp disagreement*” that arose between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. Its semantic range includes “*rousing to activity, stirring up, provoking*”[4]

The goal here would be to rouse to action not as a result of disagreement as in Acts 15, but to provoke to action in response to the great redemptive news of X (10:19-21).

B/c Jesus has given us confidence through his blood, let us draw near, hold fast, and stir one another to love and good works.

This stirring up in response to X’s work has the object of love and good work. Jesus’ opening the curtain to access to God through his flesh (verse 20) is meant to produce a people who bear the fruit of loving service who bear fruit in keeping with the gracious redemption they have experienced. [this happens best in MC avenue of small group of committed members]

Gospel community is stirring - b/c we have access to God by faith in Christ And yet we still stumble away. We need to be called to “*let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,*”

We need fellow saints who’ll provoke us to draw near to Christ and live in gospel hope. This provoking happens - (1) In regular ordinary ways - by other’s example, by other’s encouragement, by other’s speaking the

gospel in love (2) In extraordinary moments - there are more pivotal times in our lives when we need the gospel

community to provoke us. If we are straying; overwhelmed; depressed/downcast; overworking; short-sighted In extraordinary moments we need the stable stirring of other saints to draw near to Christ. But that stirring comes best in the rhythm of everyday life together.

(2) A gospel community will grow you - Ephesians 4:11–16 (ESV)

Notice a couple things about maturing in community -

Community is **led** into maturity for ministry (verses 11-12) God gifts leaders to equip the saints. Not leaders to do all the ministry, leaders to ready saints for ministry.

Community is **ministering** into maturity - (verses 13-14) The body is built up, attaining “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” We mature to minister, and as we minister we mature.

This maturity coming as the maturing members of the body speak truth in love to one another (verses 15-16)

The maturity of the church into the fullness of X happens as led by leaders, but as performed by every member of the body.

The body grows the body. Each member has responsibility to serve every other, to mature each other.

To do this we must know one another - happening best in a smaller community!

This growth and maturity comes in the everyday warp and woof of life. Growing in the faith doesn't mean we are less involved in the affairs of this life. It doesn't mean a monastery lifestyle. It means we engage this life w/ our mind, heart set on X. It means we can live in and apply the gospel more thoroughly to ordinary life.

Every member is responsible to be equipped. Every member is responsible for ministry among the body. Every member helps the body grow into maturity.

The gospel community of an MC is a community of disciplers, maturing together

(3) A gospel community will fail you - 1 Corinthians 11

I think its good to remember: small groups, MCs aren't fix all, be all, perfect church method. 1 Corinthians 11:17–22 (ESV) *17 But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.*

The church in Corinth's fourth Sunday family meal was pretty crazy.

The rich brought rich people food and they claimed the seats of honor, they ate the best

food. The poor people brought what they had and were kept in their place. A prime reminder, even from earliest church: church folks are still sinners. They will wrong you w/ the best of intentions.

If true of larger church, also true of smaller group.

Beware thinking this will be the perfect representation of heavenly community ChapterPage

. . . Free from unmet expectations, free from inconvenient annoyance . . . Quite the opposite. As we know one another better, we will see our sin clearer.

And we will have more opportunity to be sinned against. But we are going in w/ a glorious gospel and we will get more opportunities to believe and display it too.

Watson/Dodson: "The hope of the gospel is that we don't have to be a perfect community since Jesus was perfect for us. When we let one another down, we point to Jesus who lifts us up. The gospel, not religious rules, unites the church. Religious community, however, says: "If I keep the community rules, then people will accept me," but gospel community says: "We are already accepted in X; therefore, we love, forgive, and accept one another." This is great news! The gospel frees us from performing for God or for the church! You don't have to impress God because Jesus impressed God for you. You don't have to pretend to be perfect, because all of us are imperfect people clinging to a perfect X, being perfected by the Spirit!"

Colossians 3:13 should be the banner over our life together. Eph 4:32 - forgiving, tender people.

MCs foster this gospel renewal in community thru . . . -- The **regularity** of our life together helps us gospel one another well. Very simply: we get more opportunities to know, love, and speak as we have regular rhythms of togetherness. A family lives together. And thereby a family knows each other well.

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You've bathed that kid, you've been swimming w/ that kid, you've lived w/ that kid for a long time. The more we are together, the more we live like a family, the more intimacy we cultivate.

Our regular and increasingly intimate life together builds trust necessary to speak truth in love. You can listen well to others bc you know they are committed to you.

-- Similarly- the **informality** of our life together helps us gospel one another well - we see more than just the "church version" of us. We see stubbed toes, disobedient fit throwing children, disappointed. Dejected. We see it all. And it positions us to gospel well. To speak the sufficiency of X to one another.

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is a revolving group. It's a lasting commitment. Imagine the fruit born over 10 years of life together, knowing each other, serving w one another.

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Week 4 – Mission in Community

Ran into a non-Xian friend/neighbor in the parking lot at Whole Foods this week. We started talking about my job and what I do thru the week and it became very fruitful

convo.

I always love to hear people's perception of pastoral ministry.

It's fun to hear what they express the goals of my work and the weekly routine.

As we think about our life together in smaller group MCs: the same type of questions come up.

Why do you do that? What do you do? How do you do it?

This week we finish off the why - we hit the mission of maturity/mission

Next week we will think about how and the rhythms of life together.

Contending today: a life of making disciples on mission happens best thru a gospel community that can know, love, display, and declare the gospel regularly.

We can grow content to seeing missions as a ministry that we perform...

Or we elect an outside agency to missionary to perform.

But the mission of God in spreading his glory and redeeming his people is at heart of the church

As the gospel makes a people new and gathers them, they exist then as a new family working out a missionary identity as glory spreaders.

These gospel shaped communities serve in a few diff ways...

(1) Communities grow better missionaries -

The church is the place where missionaries are born, nurtured, sustained.

The gospel community of the church is the place where we hear, believe the gospel.

Its the place where we grow in grace and knowledge of X, maturing in the gospel.

So its the arena of the church where we functionally live our our identity as disciples who make disciples.

1 Peter 1:17-19 (ESV)

17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

FATHER - new family language

CONDUCT YOURSELVES - life as children

KNOWING YOU WERE RANSOMED - in light of the gracious redemption of precious X

Communities are families with a new purpose and identity.

An arena for you to live in new identity - disciple, servant

And in a new purpose from that identity - make disciples, serve

Old identity - slave of sin, dead in trespasses, haters of God, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.

New identity - free from sin's corruption, penalty, power, alive in Christ, lover of God, renewed in mind, practicing righteousness as he is righteous.

Old purpose working out of identity - please yourself, get gratification

New purpose working out of identity - glorify and enjoy God forever

New purpose has an outward bend.

Whereas before you were only out to please yourself.

Now that you've been redeemed from slavery, you want all to see the preciousness of your redeemer.

So the gospel community grows missionaries b/c it gives us a place to grow in living out our identity as sons/daughters in the family of God and it equips/encourages us to live out our purpose as enjoyers and spreaders of God's glory.

Your new identity and purpose is fostered best in a smaller group of committed members.

(2) Communities display deeper relationships -

Paul demonstrates the breadth and depth of the unity of the church

Ephesians 2:12–22 (ESV)

12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Though Jews/Gentiles were formerly divided, separated - now reconciled in Christ. And their reconciled life together demonstrates God's glory, the gospel's power to all.

Ephesians 3:7–10 (ESV)

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

The reconciled, lovingly unified, deep relationships of the gospels community is evidence of the gospel's power to all - heavenly realms and neighbors next door.

Part of that convo on Whole Foods parking lot - w/ a guy We have known for 10 months He expressed how he thinks we are different from what he's known of church. When I talked about our family life - he said, "yea, I have seen that. I like that." The reconciling power of the gospel has been displayed to him in our family life together.

Living together in gospel commitment displays this beautiful picture to our neighbors/ We display a depth and breadth in relationship that provokes questions. We display the truth and power of the gospel as we live together in unity and love. Steve Timmis and Tim Chester make the argument this way in *Total Church*, "*Christian community is a vital part of Christian mission. Mission takes place as people see our love for one another. We all know that the gospel is communicated both through the words we say and the lives we live. What Jesus says is that it is the life we live together that counts.*"

They go on, "In our experience people are often attracted to the Christian community before they are attracted to the Christian message."

Our shift must come, they say, from "putting on attractional events to creating attractional communities.

Unleashing the attractional power of a group of born again people with supernatural love for one another will do more than regular attractional services and events.

Be its possible to have a lot of spiritual activity and not engage our neighbors well. But our shared spiritual lives equip us to engage and give us a loving family to invite into.

Timmis and Chester in *Total Church*, "*Jesus prays that those who believe in the gospel "may be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:20-23). The world will know that Jesus is the Son of God sent by God to be Savior of the world through the community of believers. "No one has ever seen God," says John in his Gospel, "but God the One and Only, who*

is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). The invisible God is made visible through the Son of God. "No one has ever seen God," says John again in his first letter, "but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:12). The invisible God is made visible through the love of the people of God. The life of the Christian community is part of the way by which the gospel is communicated," 58-59.

(3) Communities balance gifts - whole body working together.

This should be cold water in a dry desert to the introvert.

If the idea of a deepening conversation with your across the way neighbor scares the bejeebers out of u

This is good news . . .

1 Corinthians 12:4–31 (ESV)

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. 12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Breen, Leading Missional Communities

"The beauty of doing evangelism this way is that everyone in the MC plays a role. There's a place for the extrovert, the introvert, the eloquent, the stuttering, the social butterfly, and the awkward. Some people will be amazing party planners. Others will be great at leading others in a short meditation on Scripture. Others will be wonderfully gracious hosts for dinners. Still others will be excellent at attending to all the details that need to happen to pull off a great barbecue. Others will be great networkers, inviting many people into the community. Growing the family (which is all evangelism is) becomes a community endeavor! We take the People of Peace we have as individuals and introduce them to an entire community, and people have a chance to experience "church" as a network of relationships instead of a meeting to attend. The beauty of doing evangelism this way is that everyone in the MC plays a role. One person might start a relationship with neighbors, but as she build relationships with them and invites them to meet the whole MC in formal and informal ways, someone else entirely ends up sharing the gospel with them. Cool! Some people may be great at planning and hosting incredible parties (S1); others may not be as good at that but are very sensitive to knowing when people may be ready to hear an insightful spiritual remark (S2) or perhaps even sharing the gospel in a warm, welcoming way (S3). Everybody gets to play a role in an MC when we attend to the various phases of sowing, reaping, and keeping."

(4) Communities sustain mission long term.

Identity is lived out, not just a job or task.

But as new people, we persevere in redeemed identity.

John 20:21-23;

As father sent son so son sends us

Identity: sent ones

Purpose: emissaries

- *The Father sent the Son*
- *The Father and the Son sent the Spirit*
- *The Father, Son, and Spirit send the Church*

We avoid burnout by a sustaining community that encourages our embrace of identity and power.

Missionaries fatigue over the long haul.

But the gospel consistently applied gives life.

And the best arena for consistent gospel application is in a family that knows you.

Life together in gospel commitment grows us for mission, it displays deep relationships, balances us, and sustains us.

As we begin to get dinner in coming weeks and make commitment to life together - let's spend a big chunk of time praying.

Asking God to prepare us, mature us as his missionaries in community

And asking for open eyes to see the field, the folks he's put around us. Pray to that end now.

Week 5 – Family Life Rhythms

I am really thankful for y'all hanging on thru the last 4 weeks as We have worked thru key principles.

It's something like showing your style to an interior designer.

If Joanna Gaines is going to decorate your house - she needs to know if you're french country, mid-century modern, rustic italian, country chic, etc.

Once she knows your style, she makes decisions on your decor.

The principles of style dictate the practicalities of your backsplash, mantle, couch, etc.

Same here - the principles of GCM give way to practicalities of life together.

MC: small group of members committed together for maturity and mission.

Saw last week in Peter how maturity and mission go hand in hand.

A mature people are better equipped for mission.

Mature family is a good picture of gospel beauty and reality.

Today - we get to nitty gritty.

Thanks for bearing thru 4 weeks of principles.

We could have just worked ourselves into a couple groups, started mtg, and fleshed it out.

But the hope was driving into principles of GCM will press us into informed intentionality.

We have intentionally held back on describing the practices as we focus on principles.

And if that's clouded what practice will look like - we will drive away the clouds today.

Principles We have walked thru will give way to practices of life together for maturity/mission.

To look into these practices, we will think of them as **rhythms**.

Every family has daily, weekly, monthly rhythms.

You probably get out of the house in the same way, at same time, w/ same things each day.

Each week you set the trash cans out at the same time, might grocery shop at same time, etc.

Every family's rhythms are different - right now w/ girls we sleep in shifts,

My uncle, a farmer, would take his family to Wendy's on same night each week, eat same thing.

Right now as a family we can set our clocks by the weekly rhythm of Fri-Sat as

“weekend days”

Each of us has a rhythm to our week.

As we think about how principles of GCM play out in life together, they will find rhythms as well.

Let's think about them in two categories: **formal/regular** rhythms and **informal/irregular** rhythms.

Formal - regular, planned in advance Informal - ordinary, spontaneous

Let's start by thinking about the informal rhythms of life together as a gospel family on mission.

By informal rhythm I mean - we seek to be together regularly in the ordinary stuff of life. So grocery shopping, babysitting, baseball games, wing nights, Las D dinners, going to festivals.

Ice cream trips, Pink palace play dates, hanging at the park

And as we do - GCM remains in view.

Life together is always around the gospel as a family on mission.

So even as we go bowling together, fishing, consignment sale shopping - our aim is to encourage one another in the gospel and if possible to spur on the advance of the gospel in mission.

This is thriving now - and as we organize and support, not much at all should change.

The hope is that the support just brings greater intentionality.

But not change to the already growing vine of family life together.

As we commit to MCs, don't worry about creating a bunch more time in our sched to be family.

Look in and see where we can invite others in and where we can participate in what we are already doing.

In this way the informal rhythm of life together opens us up to more transparent knowledge of one another - thereby we are better gospel-ers, better encouragers, better pray-ers for one another.

AND this informal life goes beyond MC group to whole body.

Again - same commitment to whole, just thriving in the smaller grouping.

But I think the smaller grouping will breed better intentionality to the whole.

I love the way Timmis/Chester summarize living together in common ways as a family on mission:

Love Jesus (together)

Love People (together)

Love Life (together)

GCM formal rhythms . . .

1 - gathering to live as a family on mission.

A family has to gather - Acts 2:42; Heb 10:24-25

The father who says he's a great part of the family but doesn't spend any time at all is fooling himself.

The family has to have time together.

And so we meet.

2 - ongoing missional engagement

As a family on mission we have regular rhythms of mission - opportunities, events, extra-ordinary stuff.

Lets spend rest of time on regular gatherings - next week on extra-ordinary missional stuff...

What do regular MC gatherings look like?

Remember: principles, not dictated practices.

I want to give you 3 ideas for working out GCM - **Up - In - Out**

Up - spiritually beneficial conversation, discussion

In - nurture and stirring in our time together

Out - invitation, opportunity, and prayer for gospel advance

So in the rhythm of every week together and every meeting we are building in fabric of up, in, out

What does this looking like in a weekly meeting?

MEET - EAT - GREET

Meet - gathering, gaggle

Eat - meal

Greet - opportunity for new faces

MEETING TIME COULD LOOK LIKE:

Start small - Sermon discussion, gospel story, prayer.

Up - sermon discussion (working thru GCM framework)

G - What did we see of God, his work, his person, his character? Our sin/need? Our redemption?

C - How is the gospel shaping our church? Is there application as a family?

M - Who needs to hear this? How? Why?

How can we be equipped as a missionary family with this?

Let our conversation aim at applying the gospel in life together for maturity and mission.
Can include studying books of Bible, books, articles, growing in grace reading
But start w sermon, core seminar discussion as baseline to begin

Next:

In - 10 min someone sharing gospel story
Handout for training how to do this well
helps us build on foundation of knowing one another

Out - mission. More here in a minute.

EATING TIME -

Up, In - conversation bending into intentional spiritual discussion
Out - inviting new faces to the table

MEET - the regular rhythm of open dinner and the extra-ordinary endeavors of the family
in cookouts, events, etc.

The mission/meeting should take three forms in the weekly rhythm.

(4) preparing. Up and in are prep for out

We help each other they equip, encourage, thinking thru convos.

(2) praying. We pray for one another and for spirit to give new birth.

Use G C M for prayer structure which drives us weekly into missional praying.

(3) partying. Had to be p. Each week we have a meal that anyone can enter into.
inviting others into dinner - the ordinary/regular rhythm.

And the extra-ordinary rhythm. Special cookout, etc. more there next week.

Up. In. Out. Meet. Greet. Eat.

Discussion. Dinner.

That's it. Keep it simple - ESPECIALLY AS WE GET STARTED.

Meet. Eat. Greet.

Up. In. Out.

Work GCM living as a family on mission into the DNA of a weekly gathering.

This ought to make us somewhat uncomfortable -

Not just a gathering of friends doing friendly things, inviting people like us into a
relationship w/ us.

We are a group of redeemed rebels, uniting thru differences around the gospel, inviting
other rebels in to see, hear, smell redemption.

These principles/practices/rhythms should demonstrate a people formed, united by the
gospel.

So we avoid age/stage/affinity.

Hoping that people can not walk into a gathering and peg us as a young married, singles, couples, etc.

Rather - the only reason we are together - the gospel.

To mature in gospel application together.

To spread gospel news together.

That means when we think about our commitment/meeting/life w/ a group - we are intentional to embrace those unlike us.

Our meal last week - Paul, Wes, Bakers, Ian, Wallaces - a motley crew

We need to labor as a church at large and as smaller groups to keep our gospel commitment central.

To the end that no one would ever feel out of place.

Every person that comes should feel the welcome of a family.

Rhythms help:

- us know what to expect
- people not fall thru the cracks
- people not fall into guilt for failing to meet with everyone they know
- us know one another well
- us have plenty of margin, space for unbelievers to be around

As we start - TAP

Talk about it -

Adjust w/ flexibility -

Pray -

Week 6 – Rhythms (cont.), Leaders, Members, Getting Started

This week we complete final flight instructions for an expression of life together in small groups

I have been your flight attendant - showing you the flotation device of the gospel.

How to buckle the seat belt of community.

And how that propels us onto the journey of mission.

Or something like that.

This week as another “nuts and bolts” week -

We’ll finish thinking thru rhythms of life, talk about leaders, members, and getting started.

Rhythms -

Talked last week - informal/formal

What are informal rhythms?

- all of life commitment, together in the ordinary, mundane - loving and living like family.

What are formal rhythms?

- regular gatherings and regular mission.

Gatherings - remember the 3 elements to gatherings?

Up, In, Out - We meet, we eat, we greet.

Meet - our conversation as a group for spiritual maturity.

Starting off -

1 - Apply the sermon together thru GCM lens

(5) Did you see any root sin exposed? Did you see X as able to redeem?

(6) How will this change the way you love, pursue, care for community?

(7) How are you prepared for life on mission?

2 - Gospel stories - knowing each other and the work of Christ in us.

3 - Pray - thru GCM lens.

That's it. Simple conversation. Nothing special. No major study to prep. Just family conversation.

Imagine as the conversation a natural family would have as they grow together.

2nd, Regular/formal rhythm - mission rhythms -

Each gathering when we eat is an opportunity to invite in.

And as interest/readiness grows we can invite into discussion.

We create an opportunity in dinner where anyone can come in and feel no pressure to perform.

But we can also invite into deeper convo's of meeting if there's interest increasing.

But as we gather to meet we are also encouraging mission as we are asking about each members life on mission and we are praying.

As a part of that - we are asking together - how can we engage/meet/introduce people to Jesus?

Regular mission capitalizes on regular everyday life.

Love Jesus, people, life - Timmis/Chester.

Regular mission is the MC is also planned, executed.

So it might be cookout, school supplies, BYBC, neighborhood block party, GF event,

This is where it is exciting - the mission of the MC emerges from the people of the MC

So we give principles to guide - but the practicalities emerge from the people.

You're way better at coming up w/ ways for your MC to engage non-Xian than I am dictating particular expressions of mission.

So pray, talk together, and plan.

There's tremendous room to move around here - under GCM heading.

Let's think for a min about the makeup of that dynamic in leaders and members.

Leaders -

Now we have a good problem - a handful of folks who would be capable leaders.
But we asked 4 guys in particular who balance gifts well and who are living in
community well to lead.

And We have already got a great pool of leaders for new groups.

Leaders - wear at least 3 hats . . .

1 - Shepherd - exercise care for members

As MCs help us focus our covenant commitment to one another - MC leaders care like
shepherds.

Shepherding that invites into the family.

Shepherding that pursues when some stray.

Shepherding that counsels w/ care in crisis.

2 - Facilitate - organize, plan, lead meeting time.

Helps by leading in determining meeting schedule, time, day, duration.

Leaders send the first text.

They bring schedules to bear on reality and help get folks together.

Then when we are together they facilitate by starting food, convo, or otherwise.

Leaders send the first text.

Leaders holler to say its time to eat.

Leaders break into good convo as we gather to meet.

They help steer, focus that convo if it wanders into left field.

3 - Equip - identify, train, encourage new leaders for new MCs.

Goal is that we would reproduce as new faces come to us and come to X.

MC leaders are modeling what others can do to lead groups.

And they are in position to help others take up mantle of leadership.

Members - expressing GCM commitment in 3 ways...

1 - Up -

Remember - MC commitment is to narrow focus of broader membership.

So we are primarily following Jesus together - same as broader church.

We commit to be disciples, learners of X.

2 - In -

Again - MC is narrow focus for sweeter, deeper life together in community.

So we go "in" to the body (the smaller section of body) for soul-care, encouragement.

We do this in meeting and eating.

3 - Out -

We commit to mission together as a family. Greet and in special times.

This ought to make us somewhat uncomfortable -

Not just a gathering of friends doing friendly things, inviting people like us into a

relationship w/ us.

We are a group of redeemed rebels, uniting thru differences around the gospel, inviting other rebels in to see, hear, smell redemption.

These principles/practices/rhythms should demonstrate a people formed/united by the gospel.

So we avoid age/stage/affinity.

Hoping that people can not walk into a gathering and peg us as a young married/singles/couples...

Rather - the only reason we are together - the gospel.

To mature in gospel application together.

To spread gospel news together.

That means when we think about our commitment/meeting/life w/ a group - we are intentional to embrace those unlike us.

Our meal last week - Paul, Wes, Bakers, Ian, Wallaces - a motley crew

We need to labor as a church at large and as smaller groups to keep our gospel commitment central.

To the end that no one would ever feel out of place.

Every person that comes should feel the welcome of a family.

As we begin: TAP

Talk about it - in MC.

Living in close, regular, routine community is new to some.

Let's be honest about our fears, and let's press in with some transparency.

Bc then we will have better opportunity for gospel application and demonstration.

Ask questions together.

I am excited about what this will look like as we hit a rhythm in 6 months.

As we think and pray, applying GCM we are going to grow in deeper caring community, display the gospel in our love for one another in some great ways, and think of some awesome ways to engage nonXians. Let's do it together.

Pray.

We are Spirit dependent.

This is something new for us -

In the past, our community/mission in smaller groups was thru Sun school class.

And the "thru the week" commitment was very little.

So as we commit - its not just to meeting more

It is to the people.

This is our membership covenant lived out in careful community w/ a smaller group.

For our maturity and for our life lived on the mission of God.

Take a long-term view -

Now granted you'll probably multiply your group and lose members.
The folks you sit with tonight and chat with won't be the very same people you are living in gospel community with for mission in 30 years, but some likely will be.
Imagine the opportunity for Jesus to get the glory his name is due in our lives as we persevere with one another with a long term commitment.
Knowing that like fine wine, our knowledge of one another, our ability to encourage one another, our gifting in mission, our genuine love will grow more, more, more.
Let's commit for the long haul - knowing the journey and the destination will be immeasurably sweet.

APPENDIX 4

STRATEGIC PRIORITY LIST

The strategic priorities for sustaining and developing missional communities at CBC have been developed with the goal of giving the church's membership opportunity for discipleship and mission in community for the next 3 to 5 years. In the life of the church missional communities offer a structure for meaningful membership care with a smaller group that facilitates discipleship and postures members individually and collectively for mission. The beginning of a formalized missional community in the spring of 2017 was launched through a 6-week training curriculum that sought to establish a formal structure around the church's existing informal small group structure. During the curriculum implementation two pilot groups began to meet. In the strategic priority list that follows I seek to address issues that have arisen from the Transformational Discipleship Assessment data as well as those that have emerged from the pilot groups. In identifying issues the hope is to set out a plan for the next 3 to 5 years addressing necessary issues in systematic ways.

Ongoing Training

As with any new beginning, success in ongoing missional community small group structure at CBC will require consistent realignment. Leaders and members approach involvement with the baggage of prior small group experiences at CBC and other churches. Most participants approach this small group structure with an existing framework that either needs realignment or deconstruction in order to embrace CBC's practice of small groups as extended families organized around the gospel for discipleship and mission.

Framework for Ongoing Training

I intend to facilitate this realignment in ongoing training through the regular ongoing rhythms of church life, quarterly all-group training sessions, and monthly meetings with missional community leaders. A varied approach layers necessary teaching for all members and leaders. In this way we intend to also allow multiple teachers including other church pastors and leaders to lead the training.

Ongoing training in regular rhythms. Our church's three-tiered approach to commitment together in membership offers a regular pattern of training and application for missional communities. Through our weekly worship gathering, bi-weekly discipleship groups, and weekly missional community meetings we can introduce and reinforce various elements of life together in Christ in community for mission. Sermon subjects and application, discipleship reading resources, and sermon application questions for missional communities can all be used as ongoing training tools in the regular rhythms of church life.

Ongoing training for missional community leaders. Shaping the culture and practice of small groups begins with teaching and shaping the leaders. Each month we will plan to meet with all missional community leaders at once for ongoing training, discussion, and prayer. Monthly missional community leaders meetings give an opportunity for ongoing training with existing and potential future leaders allowing for reinforcement of foundational values through leadership development. In those meetings we will review foundational purposes for missional communities in maturity and mission, allow for developmental training of leaders, identify potential leaders, identify guests and need for invitation or follow-up, and pray.

Ongoing training for missional community members. Once a quarter we will hold training for every member of a missional community in our church and open up

the training for guests and potential members. This training gives us the opportunity to reinforce the foundational truths and rhythms of life together in our small group structure, as well as maintain a unified culture and unified practices in groups. It will focus on reviewing foundational elements of life together in Christ in community for mission as well as discuss issues or adaptations that may arise in the course of group life in the next 3 to 5 years. An annual plan for training will be developed with group leaders every January and while subject to change, will generally guide the training sessions scheduled for that year. This allows other pastors and group leaders to prepare to lead the training session in advance and to prepare preparation or follow-up material for the training session to be discussed in groups.

Areas to Address in Training

The analysis of pre-test and post-test assessments surrounding the initial delivery of the training curriculum offers insights into a few areas to address in ongoing instruction. While there were no alarming deficiencies, there were noticeable deficits in respondents' answers regarding daily Bible study, dealing with sin in community, and engaging our neighbors with the gospel. This strategic priority of ongoing training will address these deficiencies through both quarterly all-participant meetings and monthly leader meetings. The structure of ongoing training will be organized through the three categories of gospel (life with God), community (life together), and mission (life on mission). As we move systematically through those categories in training the deficiencies uncovered in the TDA assessments will be addressed in priority order.

The first step in ongoing training will be to revise the training curriculum that was delivered as the missional community small group structure was established. Utilizing this foundational curriculum will provide a solid basis for future reinforcement among leaders and participants. Revising the curriculum will be done in 3 stages. First, the existing group leaders will be given digital copies of the teaching manuscripts to offer

feedback and suggestions. After they have edited the manuscripts, I will review and prepare the manuscripts for print in booklet format for use in group training and in new group development. Lastly, I will take the content of that booklet and summarize it into a pamphlet size overview handout for potential group participants to get acquainted with group structure and practice. This material will remain useful in future trainings in the categories of gospel, community, and mission as we reinforce group dynamics with current participants.

Gospel. In developing on-going training the group members' understanding of the gospel and its impact and usefulness for Christian maturity is pivotal. Therefore, all training will spring from a gospel foundation – that is to say: all training will be geared for believers in Christ to progress in the faith such that they battle sin and embrace the gospel in daily application of grace in community for mission. This category includes participants' practice of spiritual disciplines in pursuit of godliness through the gospel. The TDA data revealed deficits in daily Bible reading and regular in-depth Bible study. These areas will take high priority in on-going training among leaders and participants.

As a church, we will develop a three-part approach to addressing group participants' deficit in daily Bible reading and in-depth Bible study. First, utilizing the group leader training to equip group leaders through solid resources on spiritual disciplines like daily Bible reading we will be able to train those who will be demonstrating skills and encouraging their groups in accountable devotional habits. Training leaders will aid them as they encourage and equip group members for the regular practice of spiritual disciplines like Bible study. In addition to training leaders, utilizing the quarterly all participant training sessions to offer training on the nature of Scripture, hermeneutics, and the spiritual disciplines will equip members to overcome irregular habits in Bible reading. A third and final plan will be to offer an 8 to 10 session hermeneutics training series in our Core Seminar hour on Sundays. This series will be

open to all members, but would be an ideal opportunity to equip members of missional communities to engage the Scriptures daily.

A final weakness to address from the TDA data under the category of the gospel and Christian maturity is in financially supporting fellow members and the church budget. In both pre-test and post-test at least 33 percent indicated that they disagreed with the statement that they regularly give financially to their local church. Addressing this issue in discipleship is a lower priority than others, but it is an important issue to address in participants discipleship in community. As a part of the strategic priorities, regular teaching on financial support and giving will be planned for the entire congregation. In addition, helpful resources will be added to the bookstall including free handouts on financial giving and helpful books selected by the pastors.

Community. The TDA data indicated that in both pre-test and post-test assessments respondents indicated that they enjoyed meaningful relationships in the life of the church, but answers to a question regarding indwelling sin exposes need for ongoing training on fighting sin in community. In response to the statement, “I tend to dwell on the same types of sinful thoughts over and over,” at least two-thirds of respondents agreed somewhat or strongly agreed with that statement. There was a positive trend from 83.3 percent agreeing in pre-test to 66.6 percent agreeing in post-test, but the issue is significant and can easily be addressed in missional communities.

Cultivating an accountable, transparent, community where sinful struggles can be shared and collectively fought is not the product of a quick, easy mathematic formula. It requires an extended season of consistent gospel preaching and application in group life, patience and time to build trust, and abundant graciousness in receiving Christians who open up about ongoing battles with temptation and sin. Our plan for accomplishing this priority of developing a trusting, transparent community is in repeated gospel preaching and creating opportunities for deepened relationships in group life. This will

span the range of opportunities for training: from Sunday morning sermons, Core Seminar lessons, sermon application questions in missional communities, material for discipleship groups, missional community leader meetings, and quarterly participant trainings. There is no easy formula for rich community where sin can be fought with others, but the news of our acceptance in Christ and removed condemnation in repentance and faith will bring us out into the open step-by-step if the culture is proven sympathetic and trustworthy.

Mission. The TDA data showed some areas to address in ongoing training as we consider mission in community. All respondents indicated strong agreement that it is important for the church to serve the poor and hurting, yet only 33 percent of respondents indicated on a later question that they were personally currently involved in ministries or projects that serve non-church members in the community. Two-thirds of respondents felt compelled to serve outsiders but they were not currently involved whether by personal choice or lack of opportunity. The small group structure of missional communities offer flexibility and increased opportunity to engage neighbors with the support of the church. To address weakness in participants' missional practices our priority in ongoing training will include equipping strategies in personal evangelism through quarterly gatherings and through leaders in the regular rhythms of small group life. As participants commit to accountable care for one another in the gospel for mission their instruction will be in formal application of the word and in the challenge of example and encouragement from fellow members. The nature of the small group cultivates new opportunity to connect with non-Christians as missional communities plan outreach efforts and events. In addition, the example and encouragement of fellow members is pivotal to helping each participant engage in the mission of God to spread his glory through the proclamation of Christ through his people.

Group Multiplication

A second strategic priority is to establish a plan for multiplying groups. The original launch of missional communities at CBC included two pilot groups that both saw an initial increase in attendees either due to new visitors to the church or existing members joining after the initial launch. At launch there was no clearly articulated plan for when or how to multiply groups when there were sufficient members for a third group.

There is no magic number for small group capacity, but our goal is to limit missional communities between 15-20 adults. Any larger and it becomes more difficult to exercise meaningful membership care for one another. As new people come to Christ and/or join our church, placing them in a missional community is not an exact science. Existing relationships might connect them with one group over another, but we labor to maintain an intergenerational, multi-ethnic approach to placing new members if possible.

One goal of missional communities is introduce non-Christians to the Christian community and the Christian message of the gospel. As the Lord bears fruit through missional communities, maintaining a group of less than 20 adults necessitates creating new missional communities. These new groups require equipped leaders as well as trained and oriented members.

Leadership Development

Developing a plan for group multiplication involves a plan for leader multiplication. As a part of this strategic priority, we will develop a plan for recognizing, training, and deploying members who demonstrate leadership qualities and abilities. This will begin with a teaching session developed for an all-participant training meeting on the qualifications and responsibilities for missional community leaders. This session will be edited into a handout for future reference and training.

Recognizing potential leaders begins with existing missional community leaders. Therefore a second aspect of this strategic priority is an ongoing practice of

asking existing leaders to identify potential leaders within the group. While they may not be able to identify anyone immediately, when repeatedly asked as a part of monthly leaders meeting they will be trained to look for potential leaders in the life of their missional community. These existing leaders will know best what to look for in potential leaders and they will get the benefit of weekly interaction in group-life and the ability to see potential leaders exercising shepherding care for fellow members.

Training potential leaders begins in the weekly gathering of missional communities where they are able to care for fellow members and exercise leadership where appropriate as a member. Once a member has been identified as a potential leader, assessed by pastoral staff, and approved to begin apprenticing as a leader, they will be invited to monthly leader meetings and walk through resources with a pastor to equip them for missional community leadership.

Deploying potential leaders into leadership will happen before they launch a new group as they increasingly lead and take responsibility in the context of their existing group. After a period of apprenticeship, depending on the need for launching a new group, a new leader will begin with a nucleus of families to establish a new missional community. This initial period of gathering as a group will involve walking through the orientation material, training sessions during their initial meetings that include a pastor, and a season of prayer for faithful and fruitful ministry together.

Starting a New Group

Once a leader has been recognized, trained, and is ready to be deployed with a group, there are a few other key components to organizing a new missional community. A solid core team, thorough initial training, and sufficient resources and ongoing training are all necessary components. These ingredients along with capable leadership posture a missional community for ongoing success.

Core team of new group. Missional communities are small groups committed together in church membership for maturity and mission. The key ingredient for maturity and mission is God's people in community. To establish a new missional community you need at least 6 committed church members willing to embrace a small group structure for life together. It is possible to begin with fewer than 6, but it is not desirable. These newly committing members can come from the same missional community or a combination of others.

Initial training for new group. The core team for a new missional community should plan to spend their first few weeks of meetings walking through training material with leaders to embrace a common vision of life together in community for maturity and mission. Even if they come from the same missional community and form a new group, exploring their new group dynamic through foundational training materials will prove useful to establish the new group as a new collection of members with shared purpose and identity.

The six-week foundational curriculum will serve as the basis of study for newly established groups. This material may be familiar to some, but walking through it again in the context of the new group will provoke deepening conversation and provide a common starting place for every member. Concurrent with this six-week training will be a six-week prayer calendar for the new missional community that includes elements from the teaching session and petitions for individual members.

Ongoing training for new group. Each group leader receives ongoing training in monthly leader meetings. Each group member receives ongoing training in quarterly all-participant training sessions. As the new group is established, they immediately take part in these ongoing routines.

Resources for new groups. As a part of ongoing new group training, each

leader and member is provided a detailed list of resources. This list includes sermon audio, sermon manuscripts, articles, books, and book reviews compiled to train on the particulars of small group life together in missional communities. Copies of a number of these resources will be made available at no cost, in addition to some books available in the church's bookstall. By utilizing this resource list in a digital format on our website and referencing it as a part of initial group training we will be able to provide insight into good training resources for any members who are motivated for further study.

Timeline of multiplication. There is no expectation timetable for group multiplication. It is expected that one group may labor faithfully among their neighbors for a year and see little fruit, while another may have need to multiply 3 times in the same year. While we structure to facilitate growth through mission, we do not think it is helpful to set expected timelines for multiplication.

Acclimating New Members

As new members join the church through conversion and baptism or transfer of membership a third aspect of strategic priority is to use the prospective members class to highlight the importance and value of missional communities. This introduction to the church for prospective members gives us an opportunity to explain missional communities to every potential incoming member and help them make connections in an existing group if they do not already have one. As a measurable goal for this strategic priority, we would like to see 75 percent of our membership involved in a missional community in the next 5 years. One way we hope to see that happen is by orienting new members to this small group structure and helping them make connections with missional community leaders.

By utilizing our membership seminar to highlight the importance of missional communities in the life of the church we welcome everyone coming into membership to

find a place in a small group community. Because we are not requiring participation among members the hope is that providing the information, stressing the importance, and making sure visitors are connected with a missional community leader that we will be able to reach a goal of 75 percent member participation in the next 5 years. At current, a number of our members participate in a Sunday school structure that provides them with a smaller community of church members that they care for well. Understanding however that those dynamics will change as generations shift in our church lifecycle, intentionally introducing prospective members to missional communities in membership seminar should help us reach the goal of 75 percent member participation.

In order to introduce the small group structure, a one page summary pamphlet with information on missional communities further helps us make a connection with guests and potential members. Taking the foundational curriculum and stating its main points in a brief document is a tool for our welcome team and members to use as they invite newcomers into missional communities. This resource will be available at our welcome station for welcome team members to offer to guests along with a personal invitation to a missional community meeting.

Finally, we will also produce a one session summary outline of the foundational teaching curriculum and train group leaders to give an overview of missional communities in a 30-minute presentation. This will allow group leaders to meet with guests who visit missional communities to describe the vision, strategy, and structure for missional communities. This summary document will be produced by the pastoral staff and be included as a part of both a leaders' meeting training and an all-participant training session. Every leader will be encouraged to offer to meet with guests after their first visit to a missional community to overview this introduction material.

Pastoral Oversight of Missional Communities

In the next 3 to 5 years, shifting oversight of missional communities from the

senior pastor to a lay-pastor can provide more intentional development of leaders and intentional care for groups. At present, the church operates with a single ordained pastor. The church is reviewing and ready to approve a new set of governing documents that will establish governance by a plurality of pastors.¹ As that transition begins in Spring 2018, we hope to institute pastors who carry a general shepherding role in the life of the church but also have a main area of focus that is identified by the pastoral body. One area of focus we would like to see a lay-pastor oversee is missional communities.

Shifting primary oversight of missional communities from the responsibility of the senior pastor to a lay-pastor will ideally allow for more intentionality in leadership development and group structure. A lay-pastor giving oversight to missional communities can offer more focused care and can offer insight to the other pastors regarding necessary training or changes in the next 3 to 5 years of small group life. If there is a lay-pastor nominated by the church, affirmed by the pastoral body, and installed by the church that has gifting or drive to oversee missional communities, this strategic priority should create an atmosphere for long-term success.

Suggestions in Review

To complete this goal of establishing strategic priorities it was important to gain perspective and input from other sources familiar with the church and the small group structure. For that reason I established a review process for these strategic priorities that required two leaders of missional communities and one pastoral staff member to review the priorities and offer feedback and suggestions. One missional community leader suggested a factor for group multiplication that I had had not yet considered: night of the week availability. The two pilot groups both meet on Sunday evenings but that schedule prohibits some from being able to participate. As a part of the multiplication

¹ Congregational affirmation scheduled for November 20, 2017.

strategic priority, considering the night of the week that a new missional community can meet is an important factor to consider when recruiting potential members. Another missional community leader who reviewed the strategic priority list suggested a focus in ongoing leader training on shepherding and developing a personal knowledge of each member. He agreed with the four categories of the strategic priority list and affirmed his belief that if pursued over the next 3 to 5 years the small group structure should be postured for success. Two strong suggestions came in feedback from my Assistant Pastor: (1) concrete and practice core values instruction in early member training and (2) focusing energy on existing member acclimation as well as new member acclimation. His feedback was built on his involvement in group life thus far, and he noted a need for clarity on how our groups are meant to encourage and engage in mission. This subject will be highlighted in early leader and member training. In addition, some long-term members of the church rely on the Sunday School structure for their community and he suggested various ways to promote and highlight missional communities as an intergenerational small group for maturity and mission. In particular, he suggested having members of the groups strategize together and pray as they personally invite other members of the church to join them in their missional community. This, combined with announcements and promotion in worship gatherings, will hopefully result in new additions to missional communities from among our older saints.

Conclusion

The life of missional communities at CBC is shaped by the week-in and week-out rhythms of leaders and members committed together around the gospel for maturity and mission. As we progress together in the formal rhythms of weekly meetings and the informal rhythms of life together we believe we best position ourselves as a church to grow as disciples and to make disciples. The hardships and unknown issues that lay ahead in the next 3 to 5 years will require adaptability and patience, but with these

strategic priorities in place we believe we are in a position to succeed together. As we develop ongoing training for groups in response to the TDA assessment, we hope to strengthen our groups through the categories of gospel, community, and mission. As we plan to multiply groups, recognize, test, train, and deploy new leaders, and acclimate new members into missional communities, we believe this structure is on strong footing for long-term fruitful ministry at CBC. As pastoral oversight becomes more focused and shared, we see the groups thriving in their twin purposes of maturity and mission. May God be pleased to make our strategic priorities a reality for his glory.

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A SMALL GROUP STRUCTURE THAT CULTIVATES DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSIONAL LIVING AT CHEROKEE BAPTIST CHURCH IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

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This project was designed to develop a small group structure that cultivates discipleship and missional living at Cherokee Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. Chapter 1 explains the purpose, goals, context, and rationale for the project. Chapter 2 explores the biblical and theological basis for discipleship and missional living within a small group context. An exegesis of Colossians 1:21-23, 2:6-7, Hebrews 10:24-25, Matthew 28:19-20, and other supporting texts support the purpose of this project. Chapter 3 explains the theoretical and practical support for cultivating discipleship and missional living in small groups. Chapter 4 describes the project including the initial assessment, curriculum development, implementation of curriculum, post-assessment, results, and long-term strategic planning. Chapter 5 evaluates the projects success and details areas for improvement.

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