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A Missional Outreach Strategy for the High Pointe Church of Christ

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A MISSIONAL OUTREACH STRATEGY
FOR THE HIGH POINTE CHURCH OF CHRIST

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JAMES NORED
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ABSTRACT

A Missional Outreach Strategy for the High Pointe Church of Christ

James Nored

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2011

This paper presents a missional outreach strategy for the High Pointe Church of Christ, a suburban congregation in McKinney, Texas, where I serve as senior minister. Missional outreach draws upon the *missio Dei* and the missional church concept, and can be defined as evangelism with a missional thrust. This missional outreach strategy is based upon the life and mission of Jesus, resulting in a missional outreach strategy of seeking the lost, serving the community, and sharing the good news. This strategy has been implemented at High Pointe over a period of three years.

The seeking the lost strategy has utilized social networking and has been expressed through missional lifestyles, seeker small groups, missional small groups and communities, church planting, and online social networking. The serving the community strategy has been exhibited through members utilizing their spiritual gifts, blessing the unchurched in their daily lives, and serving in ministries which heal the physical, emotional, and spiritual brokenness in the community. The sharing the good news strategy has manifested through daily spiritual conversations, evangelistic Bible studies, and small group, online, worship, and *communitas* experiences.

This paper concludes that, using a missional scorecard and evaluation, this strategy is deemed to have largely been successful. For instance, over the last three years, nearly two hundred people have been baptized; more than twenty thousand people have been clothed and fed; hundreds of families have strengthened their marriages, reduced their debt, and recovered from addiction; and spiritual conversations and redemptive stories have been shared in daily life, online, and in small groups. While these are significant missional expressions, the need for missional church planting, however, still remains.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a missional outreach strategy for the High Pointe Church of Christ in McKinney, Texas. This is not just any type of strategy, but a “missional outreach” strategy, based upon biblical presuppositions. Missional outreach (which will be further defined below) is evangelism with a missional—“go to them”—thrust, using the overall life and mission of Jesus as its model.

While this paper uses the term “missional outreach” with little reservation, the term “strategy” is used hesitantly. Strategy often evokes ideas of human engineering, human striving, and human ingenuity; and much of modern missiology, with its emphasis upon the *missio Dei*—that God is by nature a missionary God—has sought to emphasize that mission is rooted in God, not human agency.¹ Current missional thinkers, following in this line of reasoning, have begun to question the use of a form of strategy, called “strategic planning,” in churches due to its secular and modernistic assumptions. As with

¹ The *missio Dei* means the “sending of God” or the “God of mission” and is a concept that roots mission in the nature and character of God. The Father sends the Son, the Father and Son send the Spirit, and the Son sends the Church into the world to participate in God’s redemptive mission. The *missio Dei* provided a corrective to anthropocentric understandings of mission, which justified colonialism or saw mission as the secular transformation of society, and ecclesiocentrism, where mission was equated entirely with the church. While it seems that Karl Barth did not use the term *missio Dei*, he is credited with having mediated the concept through his friend and colleague, Karl Hartenstein, at the International Missionary Council in 1952 at Willigen, Germany. See John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1-16. In Catholicism, the rooting of mission in the nature of God began to be emphasized in Vatican II. See Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 4-6. As to the term “mission,” David Bosch points out that there is no settled definition of “mission” amongst missiologists. See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, vol. 16 (London: Orbis, 1991). There are three major definitions of mission that will be used in this paper. First, mission can refer to God’s comprehensive movement towards achieving his redemptive goals and plans for all of creation—a movement in which the Church participates. This is God’s “overall mission.” See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 25. Second, mission can refer to all that the Church does to participate in God’s redemptive mission; however, “if everything is mission, nothing is mission.” See Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension* (London: Edinburgh House, 1959), quoted in Flett, *The Witness of God*, 7. Third, mission can refer to the outward impulse and outward activities of the Church that are directed towards the redemption of the world. This is evangelism with a missional thrust, or missional outreach.

these authors, I do not disdain all forms of strategy—else there would be no use for this paper; however, I do question the type of strategic planning, which I will call “business strategic planning,” which appears to violate missional theology and biblical principles.

Alan Roxburgh, in his book, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition*, states that “the kind of planning processes used in an organization will indicate its most basic convictions about who God is and what it means to be human.”² If this is true, then churches would do well to be cautious in embracing business strategic planning, for its secular presuppositions present many biblical and theological problems.³ Furthermore, in a rapidly changing world, a five-year plan produced by business strategic planning becomes virtually obsolete once completed and nearly impossible to achieve.⁴ If organizations ought to be responsive to the business environment, churches should certainly be responsive to changes prompted by the Spirit. To quote Roxburgh, “I am convinced that [business] strategic planning cannot form mission-shaped communities.”⁵

² Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition*, 1st ed., Leadership Network (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010). Roxburgh has an entire chapter in his book entitled, “Why Strategic Planning Doesn’t Work in This New Space and Doesn’t Fit God’s Purpose.”

³ The first problem with embracing business strategic planning is the use of business language and terminology, which leads towards thinking in terms of power, control, and predictability. A second problem is the subjugation of people into constituent parts in a plan, making people utilitarian and violating their basic humanity. A third problem is the inclination towards worldly measures of success. A fourth problem is the pressure towards the most “return on investment,” leading to targeting those with money and talents, and the resultant ignoring of the poor and the marginalized. A fifth problem is the inherent predisposition in business strategic planning towards faith in human achievement. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 59-85.

⁴ Ibid., 80. Henry Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning: Reconceiving Roles for Planning, Plans, Planners* (New York: Free Press, 1994). Missional author and leader Alan Hirsch also discusses the difficulty that institutional (rigidly structured, non-movement oriented) forms of church have in responding in this time of discontinuous, rapid change. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 248.

⁵ Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 79.

The problems associated with business strategic planning might lead one to wonder why I would write a paper on “strategy,” and indeed, it may be that I at times come too close to having a business strategic planning mindset. In the past I have unconsciously placed more faith in hard work and planning than God. I have failed to be as consistent in the spiritual disciplines as I would like to be, disciplines which teach dependence upon God. Will Mancini speaks of “growth idolatry,” so prevalent in ministers, which is “the unconscious belief, *on the soul level*, that things are not OK with me if *my church* is not growing”—a disease to which I surely am not immune.⁶

I have written this paper, however, because my interests and passion in both the missional church concept and evangelism run deep. I grew up in a family which regularly went on mission trips, and I began in ministry by conducting evangelistic Bible studies in the local prison. Indeed, the heart behind all of my ministry efforts has been evangelism—and, according to Will Mancini in his book, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement*, evangelists’ primary contribution to the missional mandate of the Church is strategy.⁷ My personality, strengths, and spiritual gifts all tilt towards strategic thinking about evangelism.⁸ Then in

⁶ Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 37.

⁷ Ibid., 174.

⁸ I have an extroverted, intuitive, thinking, and perceiving (ENTP) personality (based on the Myers-Briggs personality indicator); my strengths are Achiever, Ideation, Learner, Input, and Futuristic (based on the Strengths Finder assessment), and my spiritual gifts are Missional Leadership, Evangelism, Teaching, Speaking, and Leadership (based upon the Spiritual gifts assessment and assessment discussed in Chapter 6 of this paper). The ENTP personality typically has an aptitude or passion for “strategy development for new ideas, products, outreaches, or missions,” write Jane A. G. Kise, David Stark, and Sandra Krebs Hirsh in their book, *Lifekeys: Discover Who You Are*, Second, Kindle ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2005), 1512. Also see Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (New York: The Free Press, 2001).

the year 2000 I read the seminal work, *Missional Church*—a work which deeply impacted me and helped continue to shape my evangelistic strategies in a “missional” direction.⁹

There are two others reason why I have written this paper and have taken this approach. First, the need for better strategies in reaching the lost is tremendous due to the increasingly postmodern, post-Christendom world in which the Church in the West finds itself. Second, despite all of its potential misapplication, many forms of strategy and planning are thoroughly biblical. Planning is a divine attribute (cf. Eph. 1:11), and humanity’s ability to create, plan, and strategize is part of what it means to be made in the image of God.¹⁰ Strategists partner with God, following in the Spirit’s footsteps, implementing missional strategies where they see that God is already at work. Gailyn Van Rhee, in his book, *Missions: Biblical Foundations & Contemporary Strategies*, writes, “Because missions must begin with the wishes of the sovereign God yet function within the context of a social situation, strategy is defined as *the practical working out of the will of God within a cultural context*.”¹¹ Without this understanding, strategy is simply sprinkled with biblical texts, while the secular assumptions remain.¹²

⁹ Darrell L. Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹⁰ Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 20-22.

¹¹ Gailyn Van Rhee, *Missions: Biblical Foundations & Contemporary Strategies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 143. Christopher J. H. Wright explains that mission is “all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose,” whereas “missions” is “the multitude of activities that God’s people can engage in, by means of which they participate in God’s mission.” Wright, *The Mission of God*, 25.

¹² Of the twenty-six purposes that Aubrey Malphurs lists for strategic planning, five are on monetary issues, and the subjects of finances and staffing are given vastly more attention than those of prayer, spiritual discernment, or biblical study. See Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 33-36.

God's people can, however, use strategy in a "missional way" that gives priority and focus to God's actions in the world.¹³ First, all strategy must be preceded by, flow from, and be accompanied by prayer. A modern, secular worldview that has been lightly "Christianized" will make prayer perfunctory; however, churches that are reaching the most people for Christ report that prayer is foundational to their success.¹⁴ Second, in order to keep a priority and focus on God's working in the world, there must be a deep understanding of missional theology—especially the understanding that the Spirit has been sent into the world ahead of us. Third, Jesus' life and mission must be the model for any missional outreach strategies. In perhaps the most seminal missional passage in the New Testament, John 20:21, Jesus says to his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."¹⁵ Our sending is patterned after Christ.

The purpose of this ministry focus paper is to present a three-part strategy for missional outreach at the High Pointe Church of Christ in McKinney, Texas that is appropriate for its context and is biblically and theologically based; this strategy is patterned after Christ's life and mission and consists of seeking the lost, serving the community, and sharing the good news. Part One of this paper looks at the High Pointe Church of Christ in its historical context, both as a congregation in McKinney and as a part of the Restoration Movement and the fellowship, the Churches of Christ. Demographic and growth data of the congregation, the city of McKinney, and its county

¹³ Indeed, Hirsch uses the term "strategy" fourteen times and the term "strategic" twenty-five times in his work, *The Forgotten Ways*.

¹⁴ See Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches*, Kindle ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 1553-1837.

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are taken from the *New International Version*, 2011 edition.

will be examined, as well as some general areas of brokenness of suburbia. These areas of brokenness provide opportunities for the church to provide ministries of hope and healing and to share the gospel. The church will be placed within its postmodern, post-Christendom context, pointing towards the need for a missional outreach strategy.

Part Two lays out the biblical-theological basis for a missional church, looking at both the missional nature of Scripture and of God. In particular, the life and mission of Jesus is recapitulated to draw out the mission of the church, for his life and mission is the model for the church's life and mission. Next, a more specific history and theology of evangelism is given and combined with a missional understanding of being "sent," resulting in a definition and understanding of missional outreach.

Part Three brings out the missional outreach strategy that is based upon the life and mission of Jesus. The "seeking the lost" strategy focuses upon social networking through missional lifestyles, seeker small groups, missional small groups and communities, and church planting, as well as online social networking. The "serving the community" strategy focuses upon using one's spiritual gifts in daily life and in ministries that address the brokenness of suburbia. The "sharing the good news" strategy focuses primarily upon an evangelistic Bible study that I have written, *The Story of Redemption*, as well as sharing the good news through small groups, online community, community witness and worship, and *communitas* experiences.¹⁶ The paper concludes with a summary and examination of the effectiveness of the implementation of this strategy.

¹⁶ James Nored, *The Story of Redemption*, 2nd ed. (McKinney, TX: PrintRight, 2010).

PART ONE

CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HIGH POINTE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Implementing a missional outreach strategy in any existing church is no simple task. In order to bring about this type of change, it is essential to understand a congregation's history, its theological underpinnings, and its people. This chapter gives a historical overview of High Pointe, its theology and values, demographic data of the congregation, and a summary of past and current outreach strategies in order to better understand how to make this missional transition.

Historical Overview of High Pointe

The High Pointe Church of Christ in McKinney, Texas has a long history with strong ties to the community, the Restoration Movement, and Churches of Christ. The city of McKinney and the county in which the city is found, Collin County, are named after Collin McKinney, one of the early converts in the Restoration Movement.¹ Though Collin McKinney was born in New Jersey, he later moved to Kentucky, one of the

¹ Collin McKinney played a significant role in Texas' history, helping to write the *Texas Declaration of Independence* and *Texas Constitution* and creating the geographical shaping of the county, which included making McKinney the county seat. See Stephen D. Eckstein, *History of the Churches of Christ in Texas, 1824-1950* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1963), 16; and Alice Pitts and Minnie Champ, *Collin County, Texas, Families* (Hurst, TX: Curtis Media, 1994), 343.

centers of the Restoration Movement. There he encountered Barton W. Stone, who along with Alexander Campbell was a primary leader in what later came to be known as the Restoration Movement or the “Stone-Campbell Movement.” McKinney was baptized by Stone, and he moved to Texas in 1824 to what is now Texarkana, becoming the first known member of the Restoration Movement in Texas. In 1845 Collin McKinney moved with his family near to the Collin county and Grayson county line. Through his leadership, this movement quickly spread in North Texas. A Christian church was organized by J. B. Wilmeth and began to meet in the home of Carroll McKinney.

The Church of Christ in McKinney began in 1917 when three men, Lex Lowrey, George Hardin, and F. M. Scott, began meeting in homes.² In 1918, this new church moved into a Presbyterian church building that was vacant on the southwest corner of Church Street and Davis Street. After two and a half years, the church moved into Pope Theater on North Kentucky Street, and then to R&R America Theater. In 1923, the church purchased a house to meet in at 409 Wilcox Street, and they named themselves the Wilcox Street Church of Christ. At this point in time they had 161 members, and they stayed in this location for twenty-three years.

Over time, the congregation changed locations several times and continued to grow. In 1946, the congregation moved to a new building at the corner of Church Street and Davis Street, and they renamed themselves the Davis Street Church of Christ. In 1965, the church merged with the Hunt Street Church of Christ, and attendance ranged

² This and the rest of the church’s historical information is according to internal church documents. It is unclear whether these men came from the Christian Church, moved into the area, or were converted and had no previous church. It may be that the division over instrumental music and missionary societies that began to afflict the churches in the Restoration Movement would also strike the Christian Church in McKinney. See J. Lee Stambaugh and Lillian J. Stambaugh, *A History of Collin County, Texas*, Texas County and Local History Series, vol. 3 (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 1958), 92.

between 250 and 300. In 1972, the church moved into a new building at 2100 White Avenue, and they renamed themselves the Westside Church of Christ. This building had an auditorium capacity of 450. The church expanded its youth and children's ministries, filling the auditorium and class rooms to capacity. In 1987, with attendance hitting six hundred, the congregation moved to two worship services.

In 1990, the church bought seventeen acres of land on the Northwest corner of Wilmeth Road and Central Expressway, an area where the future growth of McKinney was projected to go. In 1997 the Westside building was sold, and in May of that year the church began meeting in Faubion Middle School. In 1998 a new senior minister was hired. In November of 1999, a new name was chosen for the church: "High Pointe Church of Christ." (High Pointe is the name of a subdivision that is near the church's current location.) Church documents state the following: "In the fall of 2000 the congregation moved into its third new facility with a renewed commitment to growth throughout the greater McKinney area and the world. High Pointe began the new millennium with the same mission that drove Collin McKinney and J. B. Wilmeth before them: to seek and save the lost."³

High Pointe's senior minister was let go in 2005, and church went without a full time preaching minister for two and a half years. The downward attendance slide that began towards the latter part of the previous senior minister's tenure continued during this time. In 2008, I was hired as the new senior minister.

³ With this commitment, however, also came a \$3 million debt, which, as will be detailed, would seriously challenge the church's commitment to this mission. Furthermore, the linking of church growth and seeking and saving the lost may allude to the conflation of the two concepts that would come.

Theology and Values

As a “Church of Christ,” High Pointe owes much of its theology and values to the theology and values of its fellowship. The Church of Christ (or Churches of Christ) is a congregational, autonomous, Christian fellowship that came about in the Restoration Movement. This movement in the United States began towards the beginning of the nineteenth century during the Second Great Awakening. Originally, the Restoration Movement was a unity movement that called Christians to come out of denominations. The path to achieving this unity was to restore New Testament Christianity and rely upon the Scriptures alone, leaving behind divisive creeds, confessions, and human forms of church government. The presupposition behind these two themes of unity and restoration was the right of individuals to pursue religious truth on their own.⁴

A recounting of the historical shaping of the theology and values of Churches of Christ is important in understanding High Pointe’s theology and values for two reasons. First, the Church of Christ has no written creeds or confessions. There are, however, numerous unwritten creeds, assumptions, and patterns of interpretation in Churches of Christ and High Pointe, many which its members are unaware of due to the fellowship’s general lack of interest in and even lack of awareness of its own history. This lack of historical interest and awareness is due to the fellowship’s desire to go back to the

⁴ Richard T. Hughes, *Reclaiming a Heritage: Reflections on the Heart, Soul & Future of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2002), 30. These two themes of unity and restoration, while perhaps seeming to be complimentary (and were viewed to be complimentary by the early Restoration leaders), have in actual practice turned out to be “antagonistic.” Robert S. Bilheimer, *The Quest for Christian Unity*, A Haddam House Book (New York: Association Press, 1952), 393-94. Richard Tristano characterizes these two themes as an attempt to unite absolute truth (through the Bible) with individual opinion (which necessarily must exist in a unity movement). “In this synthesis is the genius and fatal flaw of the movement.” See Richard M. Tristano, *The Origins of the Restoration Movement: An Intellectual History* (Atlanta: Glenmary Research Center, 1988), 153.

practice of the early Church and to use the Bible only as its guide. Without being aware of its history, however, the church is unknowingly influenced by it even more. Second, when seeking to make a theological shift, such as transitioning the church into a missional church, it is helpful to draw upon some aspect of the fellowship's theological history to minimize as much as possible an identity crisis. Drawing upon this history also helps build support for the theological shift, for it helps the church to see that this shift is consistent with its historic values.

Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell (Thomas's son), and Barton W. Stone have been seen by Restoration Movement scholars as the primary leaders and theological shapers of the movement, hence the alternate name, the "Stone-Campbell Movement." The great evangelist, Walter Scott, is named prominently in this first generation of leaders as well. The irony for the Restoration Movement in regards to theology is that the founders of the movement claimed to reject theology and man-made creeds in favor of "going back to the Bible," the right to individual interpretation, and unity in Christ. These are profoundly theological ideas, with a high Christology, belief in the Scriptures, and faith in human reasoning and understanding. All four of these founders would make significant contributions to this anti-theological theology.⁵

As might be expected in a unity movement, the diversity amongst these leaders was quite profound. Deeply influenced by their modern, scientific age, Thomas Campbell

⁵ Alexander Campbell rejected the concept of theology. When he began at Bethany Bible College, the college would have no theology courses—only Bible courses. See Stephen Sprinkle, *Disciples and Theology: Understanding the Faith of a People in Covenant* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999), 6; and M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1997), 44. Walter Scott rejected theology, and yet could still speak of the "theology of the New Testament." Though he equated biblical interpretation with theology, he wrote what might be thought of by outsider observers as the first systematic theology in his work, *Gospel Restored*.

and Alexander Campbell were decidedly postmillennial and optimistic in their worldviews. Alexander Campbell's contributions to the movement were numerous, but perhaps his greatest contribution was the systematic categorization and delineation of the Christian faith into a constitution that could be scientifically studied, discerned, and followed. The perfecting of this system—ironically, by looking backwards at primitive Christianity—would usher in this new reign of Christ.⁶

Scott shared Alexander Campbell's and Thomas Campbell's optimism, and his primary contribution to ushering in the new reign was the preaching of the gospel and the "plan of salvation."⁷ Originally, this plan consisted of six parts: belief that Jesus is the Messiah, repentance of one's sin, baptism (immersion), forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. In order to make the plan more memorable and able to be listed on one hand, Scott collapsed the last two parts into simply the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Later generations would transform this "five-finger method" into a purely human response: hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized.) These simple and sequential steps for salvation with their logical progression "made sense" to Scott's frontier audience, and this plan provided a clear assurance of salvation to those who had been told that they had to wait until the Holy Spirit fell upon them in a dramatic way in order to

⁶ Alexander Campbell's work, *The Christian System in the Reference to the Union of Christians and the Restoration of Primitive Christianity*, popularly known as *The Christian System*, laid out the New Testament as a Constitution, with Jesus Christ as its king and chief lawgiver. See Douglas A. Foster, *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 130. In regards to postmillennialism, Alexander Campbell even named one of his periodicals *The Millennial Harbinger*, a title which reflected the thought that human progress could usher in the return of Christ.

⁷ In his early years, Scott was postmillennial; however, by 1845, he was premillennial. M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1997), 28.

know whether or not they were true believers.⁸ While Scott's plan was more balanced between God's blessings in salvation and the human response than formulations by later generations of Restoration leaders, he made the amazingly bold claim that through his preaching and plan of salvation, the gospel had been restored.⁹

Stone, on the other hand, was pessimistic, "apocalyptic" and premillennial in his outlook.¹⁰ Whereas Alexander Campbell "for all practical purposes equated the kingdom of God with the church," Stone believed that the kingdom of God transcended the church and would reach its final consummation at the end of the age. Alexander Campbell saw the New Testament primarily as a constitution for worship and church organization, whereas Stone found in these Scriptures models for holy living, rooted in an apocalyptic worldview.¹¹ Alexander Campbell rejected the idea that a direct manifestation of the Spirit in some outward manner or upon a person's heart was necessary for a person to know he or she was a true believer.¹² Stone, however, viewed the bizarre behaviors

⁸ William A. Gerrard, *A Biographical Study of Walter Scott, American Frontier Evangelist* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1992), 140. Scott was commissioned by the Mahoning Baptist Association in Ohio to be their traveling evangelist. On November 18, 1827, he preached his first sermon using his six steps of salvation. Scott believed that on this day he had preached the "Gospel Restored" using Acts 2:38 as his text. Scott would have tremendous success with this preaching and plan of salvation, baptizing three thousand people in the first three years alone of this evangelistic ministry. Gerrard, *A Biographical Study of Walter Scott*, 29-35.

⁹ Thomas Campbell had restored the Bible as the only basis of spiritual authority. Alexander Campbell had restored the New Testament constitution. Scott had restored the gospel. See Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 48-54.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹² Alexander Campbell believed that faith was belief in historical evidence, and that no direct experience of the Spirit was necessary to believe or know one was a believer. Feeling was the result of belief, not the cause. He thus rejected the idea that repentance came first, and then belief, in the order of salvation. If one believed in Jesus, then the next step would be to repent and be baptized, and through this he or she could have assurance of salvation. This difference of understanding of faith, feeling, repentance,

attributed to the Spirit at the Cane Ridge Revival of 1801, which included “jerking, barking, running, and falling,” as confirmation that the Holy Spirit was directly at work in this unity movement.¹³

The Presbyterian synod of which Stone was a part viewed these revivals differently, and the Synod of Kentucky ruled that one of Stone’s fellow ministers had violated the Westminster Confession with his participation in these revivals. This led Stone and five other Presbyterian ministers to form their own body, the Springfield Presbytery, in 1803. By 1804, however, the newly formed group decided that their movement away from denominational Christianity had not gone far enough, and they passed a famous resolution, *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, in which they resolved to dissolve their group.

We *will*, that this body die, by dissolved, and sink into union with the body of Christ at large; . . . We *will*, that our weak brethren, who may have been wishing to make the Presbytery of Springfield their king, and wot not what is now become of it, betake themselves to the Rock of Ages, and follow Jesus for the future. We *will*, that the Synod of Kentucky examine every member, who may be suspected of having departed from the Confession of Faith, and suspend every such suspected heretic immediately; in order that the oppressed may go free, and taste the sweets of gospel liberty.¹⁴

Inherent within this resolution are three ideas. First, denominations divide the “body of Christ at large.” Second, Jesus, not a denominational organization such as a Presbytery,

conversion, and baptism and their interrelationship become a tremendous source of contention between Alexander Campbell and the Baptists. In 1830, the Dover Baptist Association of Virginia would pass resolutions that excluded Alexander Campbell and his circle from fellowship. William R. Baker, *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Kindle ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 1161-1233.

¹³ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 96. For an account of Barton Stone’s experience with Cane Ridge, see Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 92-96.

¹⁴ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 97.

was king and the one to be followed. Third, non-denominationalism was the cure for religious oppression.¹⁵

Thomas Campbell had an ecumenical journey that paralleled Stone's, though his journey began in Ireland.¹⁶ When Thomas Campbell arrived in the United States in 1807, he continued the ecumenical tendencies that he had displayed in Ireland, inviting Presbyterians of all parties at Cannamaugh, Pennsylvania, to share communion. This action prompted his removal from the Associate Synod of North America.¹⁷ In 1809, Thomas Campbell began to form the "the Christian Association of Washington," an ecumenical group, "for the sole purpose of promoting simple evangelical Christianity, free from all mixture of human opinions and inventions of men."¹⁸

¹⁵ This view reflected the democratization of the Christian faith that began with the printing press. This evolution was greatly accelerated by the freedom loving and independent mindset of Americans, an attitude which was heightened by the Great Awakening. See Michael W. Casey and Douglas A. Foster, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An International Religious Tradition*, 1st ed. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 25. See also Casey and Foster, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 129.

¹⁶ Thomas Campbell's family was Irish and knew firsthand the strife caused by religious division. His grandfather was Catholic, and his father converted to Anglicanism. His father opposed his conversion to Antiburgher Seceder Presbyterianism. The Seceders opposed the attempt by the Church of Scotland to give the responsibility of choosing local pastors to "local landlords," rather than congregations; the Antiburghers were a subset of the Seceders that refused to swear an oath that supported the "religion presently professed in this realm." Thus, this group was adamant in its opposition to the idea that the state should dictate any aspect of religion. Tristano, *The Origins of the Restoration Movement*, 62-64. Despite his father's opposition, Thomas Campbell eventually pursued Antiburgher ministry and attended the University of Glasgow in Scotland. In 1798 Thomas Campbell was appointed the Antiburgher pastor at Ahorey, and within months he had joined the Evangelical Society at Ulster (ECU), an ecumenical society devoted to spreading the gospel and serving the poor. The General Associate Synod in Scotland soon took notice, voting in 1799 that the Address and Constitution of the ECU was not consistent with Secession principles. Thomas Campbell then dropped his membership in the Society, though his later actions seem to indicate that this was most likely due to pressure to conform rather than any change in belief. See Thomas H. Olbricht, Hans Rollmann, and Thomas Campbell, *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address: Text and Studies*, Atla Monograph Series No. 46 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 181-85.

¹⁷ Olbricht, Rollmann, and Campbell, *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 186.

¹⁸ This association was modeled after the evangelical associations in which Thomas Campbell had participated in Ireland, and the association was to achieve its purpose by supporting itinerant preachers and distributing Bibles to the poor. Bilheimer, *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 175, 187.

In the Association's inaugural meeting, Thomas Campbell presented his famous *Declaration and Address*.¹⁹ Though the *Declaration* said that the "sole purpose" of the Society was to promote simple evangelical Christians, the appendix states that the "society [was] formed for the express purpose of promoting Christian unity, in opposition to a party spirit." This unity would be achieved by following the New Testament with a specific hermeneutic of "express terms" or "approved precedent," seeking to "reduce to practice that simple original form of Christianity, expressly exhibited upon the sacred page; without attempting to inculcate any thing of human authority, of private opinion, or inventions of men, . . . for which there cannot be expressly produced a thus saith the Lord."²⁰ Thus, commands and approved examples were binding, but inferences and deductions from Scripture were not. In this Thomas Campbell showed the influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism, Locke's view of experiential knowledge, and Baconian induction.²¹ The *Declaration and Address* laid the groundwork for the hermeneutic of "command, example, and necessary inference" that Alexander Campbell and later generations would follow as the basis for discovering truth and unity.²²

¹⁹ The Washington Association became the *Brush Run Church* in 1811. These Reformers studied baptism and concluded that according to the Scriptures, baptism was by immersion. This led the Redstone Baptist Association to invite the *Brush Run Church* to join their fellowship, which they did. Tensions rose, however, as Alexander Campbell continued to advocate reform in his preaching and with his publication, *The Christian Baptist*. In 1824, the *Brush Run Church* joined the Mahoning Baptist Association, which hired Scott as its evangelist in 1827. The Mahoning Association disbanded in 1830, and Alexander Campbell stopped publishing *The Christian Baptist*. Alexander Campbell began a new journal, the *Millennial Harbinger*, in 1831. See William Edward Tucker and Lester G. McAllister, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (Saint Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1975), 144-45.

²⁰ This contradicted the Westminster Divines, who believed that the inferences that they had reasoned in the Westminster Confession were binding. Bilheimer, *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 229.

²¹ Bilheimer, *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 228-39.

²² After the merging of the Stone and Campbell wings of the Restoration Movement, Alexander Campbell came to increasingly rely upon "necessary inference" (which came from the Westminster

The Campbell and Stone wings of the Restoration Movement merged in 1832 at the High Street Meeting House in Lexington, Kentucky. The combining of these two unity movements occurred with a famous handshake between Stone and “Raccoon” John Smith, a Kentucky preacher who had been chosen to speak for the Campbell wing of the movement.²³ The naming of the churches in this newly merged movement would be debated, with Alexander Campbell preferring the name “Disciples of Christ” and Stone and Thomas Campbell preferring the name “Christians,” “church of Christ,” or “Christian church.” Ironically, three distinct groups would later emerge with each of these names.²⁴

Later generations largely lost the original vision for unity and the right to individual interpretation amongst the first generations of Restoration leaders, and they would instead concentrate solely on restoration and the pursuit of “truth.”²⁵ Unity would be achieved by uniformity, where everyone agreed on the same interpretation on virtually every issue. This was particularly true in Texas and the North Dallas area, which grew increasingly narrow in its viewpoint.²⁶ The divisions that soon occurred in later

Confession of 1647), whereas previously Thomas Campbell and the earlier Alexander Campbell had resisted the idea of necessary inference. The movement towards the use of necessary inference in the movement would soon begin to hinder the movement’s ability to unite with other fellowships. Baker, *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 96-114.

²³ Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1981), 185-86.

²⁴ Samuel S Hill, "Disciples of Christ," Mercer University Press, <http://www.bible.acu.edu/crs/doc/doc.htm> (accessed 10-15-10). By the end of the Civil War, these Restoration Movement churches had grown to a membership of over 200,000.

²⁵ This is the nature of reform movements. Hughes, *Reclaiming a Heritage*, 15.

²⁶ Texas and the North Dallas area came under the influence of Austin McGary, a preacher who began a periodical called the Firm Foundation. McGary was an “ardent advocate of rebaptism and a rabid enemy of the missionary society and instrumental music.” See Eckstein, *History of the Churches of Christ in Texas, 1824-1950*, 187. The first generation of Restoration leaders believed that baptism was by immersion and for the purpose of remission of sins; however, this unity movement accepted those who

generations—even amongst those that shared the same hermeneutic—have shown the fallacy of placing faith in any human system or human achievement in creating unity.²⁷

By the turn of the century, those in the Restoration Movement numbered over 500,000 people; however, ironically, this unity movement had begun to divide. The authors of *The Religious History of America* write, “In growth, they flourished; in unity, they failed. For not only did the Disciples of Christ fail to heal the divisions within Christendom, they added to them by becoming a springboard to new denominations, dividing over such issues as the use of musical instruments in worship.”²⁸ By 1906, second generation Restoration leader David Lipscomb, a Nashville preacher and editor of *The Gospel Advocate*, acknowledged to the United States Census bureau that the movement had divided into two fellowships: the Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ (Christian).²⁹ While the most visible issues of the split were instrumental music and missionary societies (opposed by those in the Church of Christ and supported by Disciples of Christ), the divide ran deeper than this. At stake was the quest for unity,

immersed for other reasons, including those who were baptized with the “Baptist” view of baptism (to be obedient to Christ or as an outward expression of an inward faith). See Eckstein, *History of the Churches of Christ in Texas, 1824-1950*, 220. David Lipscomb, a second generation leader and the editor of the hugely influential periodical *The Gospel Advocate* who was firmly opposed to instrumental music and missionary societies, vigorously opposed McGary’s exclusion of those who held a “Baptist view” of baptism. For Lipscomb, obedience was the key, not full understanding. See Eckstein, *History of the Churches of Christ in Texas, 1824-1950*, 221-26.

²⁷ Historians have noted the relative lack of imprint of Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address* upon the consciousness of those in Churches of Christ. See Bilheimer, *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 389. Undoubtedly, this is due to the general lack of historical reflection in the fellowship brought about, ironically, by a desire to do that which the *Declaration and Address* proposes—to put no faith in human opinion or authority.

²⁸ Edwin S. Gaustad and Leigh Eric Schmidt, *The Religious History of America*, Rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 156.

²⁹ For a discussion of the 1906, particularly as these numbers apply to Texas, see Eckstein, *History of the Churches of Christ in Texas, 1824-1950*, 246-49.

view of the Scriptures, and culture.³⁰ The Disciples of Christ (Christian) would split into the independent Christian Church and Disciples of Christ in 1968 over issues such as the authority of Scripture. Furthermore, there were numerous unofficial splits in Churches of Christ that would occur throughout the fellowship's history.³¹

The seeds of legalism, sectarianism, and hard patternism were embedded in the first generation of Restoration leaders, and some in later generations turned what was originally a movement of ongoing restoration into the belief that Christianity had been fully restored by the Church of Christ, with no further examination needed to be done.³² Despite these flaws, the strengths of these early leaders were numerous—a call for unity, restoration of the early Church, respect for the Scriptures, congregational autonomy, no limiting denominational hierarchy, empowerment of all members, few clergy-laity distinctions, and evangelistic fervor. All of these strengths are tremendously helpful in creating a missional movement in a fellowship or congregation, and most of these strengths are still present in Churches of Christ and the High Pointe Church of Christ.³³

³⁰ The impact of the Civil War cannot be underestimated as well, as most every religious body in the United States split into Northern and Southern factions. By 1906, the vast majority of Churches of Christ were in the South, and the vast majority of Disciples of Christ (Christian) churches were in the North. See Tristano, *The Origins of the Restoration Movement*, 133-36.

³¹ Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 403. Besides the particular doctrinal issues involved in these splits, there was a factor inherent in the movement that led to these splits—the right to individual interpretation and the rejection of human authority, the seeds of which go back to the Enlightenment and Protestantism itself. See Tristano, *The Origins of the Restoration Movement*, 137-44.

³² Alexander Campbell claimed that he never wrote “Christianity Restored” or the “Gospel Restored” on any of his writings. He saw restoration as being intimately tied to a movement—an ongoing attitude, spirit, and quest. See Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 83-84. His work, *Christianity Restored*, was a compilation of his writings from *The Christian Baptist*; however, this title was added by his publisher, and it was an embarrassment to him. See Foster, *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 129.

³³ See for instance, Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2006). Churches of Christ have virtually none of the roadblocks that Roland Allen cites that can hold back the expansion of the church, such as the need for official clergy.

The most helpful emphasis, however, that was inherent in the Restoration Movement that could be used for moving the fellowship or individual congregations to become missional is this: the supremacy of Christ. Stripping away any latent legalistic or sectarian tendencies, it can be said that in the early Restoration leaders, it was Christ who was to be preferred above all confessions and creeds. He was the basis for unity. The New Testament, and particularly the Gospels and the Book of Acts, was to be held up not for its own sake but because these Scriptures pointed to Christ.³⁴ The ultimate pattern to be followed is not a hermeneutic but Christ himself. This Christological focus was set by Thomas Campbell, who, it has been argued, set the theological agenda for his son, Alexander Campbell.³⁵ The supremacy of Christ would be a concept—or rather, a person—upon whom the first generation of Restoration leaders could all agree, and this is a concept from which a missional understanding could be developed in Churches of Christ and at High Pointe.

Despite their autonomous nature, lack of a denominational superstructure, and not having any recognized formal, founding documents, the various congregations in the Churches of Christ have been remarkably consistent in upholding the (unwritten) theology and values of the Restoration Movement. The postmodern shift in culture and decline of the Church of Christ over the last thirty years, however, has brought about an identity crisis and more diversity. Thus, the theology and values of Churches of Christ can now vary significantly from congregation to congregation and within the same congregation over time. The stated theology and values of the High Pointe Church of

³⁴ Sprinkle, *Disciples and Theology*, 9.

³⁵ Ibid., 13. See also Boring, *Disciples and the Bible*, 53.

Christ at the time that I began serving as minister in 2008 can be found in the High Pointe Church of Christ “Core Values” brochure.³⁶

The “Core Beliefs” in the “Core Values” brochure contain many statements of belief, beginning with the Bible, which is said to be “God’s perfect word and our standard of truth in all that we believe and do.” God is acknowledged as the creator of all things, and that humanity, which has been “give a free-will by God, intentionally chose to sin and thus separated himself from God.” Hell is not mentioned, but being lost is said to mean “passing from this life separated from God.” Jesus is acknowledged as “God’s son who came to earth, born of a virgin, to live a sinless life, die on the cross in the place of sinful man and arose from the grave on the third day.” Jesus is the only source of salvation, and humanity receives salvation “by grace through faith.” This faith is demonstrated “by being baptized into Christ for the purpose of receiving God’s forgiveness and God’s indwelling Spirit.” God “adds all who are being saved to his church to declare His praises, using the gifts he gives each Christian for ministry in seeking the lost.” All Christians are declared to be ministers, “charged by God to build their faith to share their faith,” and “created by God to do works of service in his name.”

While Churches of Christ, and High Pointe Church of Christ, are “non-creedal,” the above beliefs correspond with many of the beliefs found in the Apostles’ Creed, with additional beliefs and emphases that were shaped by the Reformation (every Christian is a minister, use of Spiritual gifts, salvation by grace through faith) and Restoration Movement (free will, baptism for forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Spirit,

³⁶ This brochure contains many, but not all, of the unwritten theology and values of the Restoration Movement, as well as additional values. Bill Green, "Our Core Values" (brochure for High Pointe Church of Christ, 2007).

seeking the lost, building faith to share faith).³⁷ The “Core Principles” in the “Core Values” brochure also contains beliefs and emphases that were shaped by the Restoration Movement, expressed in a single statement: “Biblical principles like the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, baptism for the remission of sins, and our heritage of a cappella singing will always be practiced.”³⁸

The sections on “Worship” and “Prayer” in the “Core Values” brochure state,

[Worship] is a time where God is praised and Jesus Christ is exalted as our Lord. Our worship is planned to be a spiritually uplifting experience. Our time of worship should be filled with the excitement that comes from a true relationship with Christ and great appreciation for the sacrifice he made for us. Further, we seek to reach those searching for the Lord and encourage everyone toward a deeper relationship with Jesus We are a church who communicates with God, not only through our prayers and His Word, but by trying to be sensitive to the promptings of his guiding Spirit.³⁹

Praising God and exalting Jesus Christ as Lord are typical goals of worship; however, the description of worship as a “spiritually uplifting experience” and “filled with the excitement that comes from a true relationship with Christ,” reflects a positive, Boomer-oriented, view of worship, shorn of lament.⁴⁰ The anticipated dual audience of both those “searching for the Lord” and “everyone” seeking a “deeper relationship with Jesus” reflects the frontier emphasis upon bringing non-Christians to worship to hear conversion

³⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 8.

³⁸ Green, “Our Core Values.” The questioning of these and other issues by some in Churches of Christ has been the cause of much consternation, as much of the fellowship’s identity is tied to these issues. See Jeff W. Childers, Douglas A. Foster, and Jack A. Reese, *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ*, Study ed., Heart of the Restoration Series V. 1 (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2001).

³⁹ Green, “Our Core Values.”

⁴⁰ The language of lament has almost been lost in the Church, but is very much needed in today’s postmodern world. Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Augsburg Old Testament Studies (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 51-58.

preaching. The idea that the Spirit directly prompts believers outside the Scriptures is a recovery of the view of the Spirit's role from the Stone wing of the movement and frontier revivalism (as opposed to the Campbell wing's and the later Texan emphasis upon the Spirit working through the Scriptures.)⁴¹ On worship style, the congregational survey in 2006 shows that the congregation is polarized on this issue.⁴²

The sections on "Family" and "Relationships" and "Spiritual Growth" in the "Core Values" brochure state the following:

We are a community of believers visibly demonstrating the reign of God in our daily lives . . . It is our desire that all people develop a loving personal relationship with God and his son Jesus Christ. We also believe it is critical to have close loving relationships with other Christians . . . We take God's Word seriously, and follow those words into the very heart of God, who authored them. We believe we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ through our daily walk with God, empowered by Him, through the Holy Spirit. Spiritual growth is viewed, not by Bible knowledge and service alone, but to the degree that "Christ Likeness" is demonstrated in our daily lives.⁴³

This emphasis upon community and relationships with other believers falls more into the "aspirational values" category, as the 2006 congregational survey reported that members have few close relationships in the church and little spiritual growth.⁴⁴

The section on "Leadership" in the "Core Values" brochure states the following:

The elders have the biblical oversight of the High Pointe church, but they do not make all the decisions. We have a system of shared leadership. The ministry staff, ministry leaders and Deacons all have leadership roles and are charged to lead

⁴¹ Baker, *Evangelicalism and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 1644-1712.

⁴² Roughly half of the congregation said that it was important to provide "worship that reaffirms the familiar traditions of the Restoration Movement," and roughly half expressing an openness to more contemporary worship. Bill Green, *High Pointe Congregational Survey* (McKinney, TX, 2006), 28.

⁴³ Green, "Our Core Values."

⁴⁴ Green, *High Pointe Congregational Survey*, 23, 39. For a discussion of aspired versus actual values, see Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 105-06.

their ministries to effectively achieve the Vision of the High Pointe Church. All of these serve under the oversight of the elders and we all serve Jesus as Lord. The elders' goal is to be shepherds by leading, equipping, guarding and caring for the congregation. Our leaders (elders and ministry staff) promote a flexibility that allows new ideas to be thoughtfully introduced into the congregation to improve effectiveness.⁴⁵

The emphasis on elders having “biblical oversight” and the roles of “leading, equipping, guarding and caring” for the congregation reflects the Restoration Movement emphasis upon the leadership of elders in local congregations. There is recognition, however, that the ministers, as well as ministry leaders and deacons, are indeed leaders. The commitment to flexibility to new ideas being “thoughtfully introduced” that is espoused is true, as ministers, ministry leaders, and deacons are usually given leeway to implement their ministries without micromanagement.

Demographics of High Pointe

There are two primary demographics that will be examined: church size and generational breakdown. The High Pointe Church of Christ is a church of approximately one thousand members and averages close to eight hundred in Sunday worship attendance. The generational breakdown is as follows: 7 percent Seniors (pre-1926), 8 percent Builders/ Silent Generation (1927-45), 23 percent Boomers (1946-64), 25 percent Generation X (1965-83), 26 percent Millennials (1984-2002), and 11 percent Generation Y (2003-present).

These demographics point towards some positive trends for missional outreach. The current size and youth of the congregation shows that the church has largely outgrown its older roots, which may help it in accepting a new missional emphasis. An

⁴⁵ Green, "Our Core Values."

“age-sex” or population pyramid of High Pointe shows that there is a fairly healthy distribution of a good growth pattern. For instance, 62 percent of the congregation is Generation X or younger, and 85 percent is Boomer or younger. In general, the graph shows a broad base pattern of younger ages, gradually shrinking with older ages. Noticeable exceptions to this are the gaps in the very youngest of Generation X, the college or young adult years of the Millennials, and the very youngest of Generation Y (0-4).⁴⁶

Past and Current Outreach Strategies

The primary local “outreach” strategy of the church under the previous senior minister was a church growth strategy. This strategy focused on having a strong children’s and youth ministry and conducting events that would draw in the community to the church building, where they would hear good preaching and be converted. While this strategy was somewhat effective in church growth, it was almost totally ineffective in bringing lost people to faith.⁴⁷ Throughout this time, however, there has been a strong foreign-missions emphasis at High Pointe, with work being supported primarily in El Salvador and through various evangelistic training centers in Russia, the South Pacific and Lubbock, Texas. The foreign missions ministry sent numerous people overseas on

⁴⁶ These gaps reflect the attendance gaps of younger generations in the Church at large in the United States. See Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 53.

⁴⁷ While the records for baptisms during this time are not available, one former elder has estimated that no more than five members of the community had been reached during the previous senior minister’s six-year tenure.

short-term mission trips over the years, which provided a good base of people to be involved in and support local outreach when I arrived.

The sections on “Outreach” and “Our Mission” in the “Core Values” state,

It is our purpose to share our faith and the reconciliation we have with God through Christ. We exist to exalt Jesus. We believe we can communicate biblical truth without compromise, while being respectful of all churches in our community. We recognize the community of McKinney will double over the next seven to ten years; therefore, the church should at least double in size during this period. We are dedicated to using these opportunities wisely and are trying to anticipate the future in our planning.

It is our mission to: 1) be a community of believers that truly reflects the spirit of Christ in all we do; 2) continuously grow in faith and spiritual maturity; 3) serve others as Christ did; and 4) share the story of Jesus Christ.

Our primary purpose is to reach those outside of Christ and help Christians to see their greatest mission is to reach those outside of Christ . . . It is the mission of Jesus.⁴⁸

There are several significant things to note about these sections. First, the phrase “we believe that we can communicate biblical truth without compromise, while being respectful of all churches in our community” reflects the original Restoration Movement themes of both restoration and unity. Second, there is an emphasis upon church growth, with a goal of doubling as the community of McKinney doubles. Doubling in size, rather than church planting as the congregation grows, is envisioned—despite the congregation’s current Latino church planting efforts. This reflects both the mentality of a church growth strategy favored by the previous senior minister, as well as a desire to alleviate financial pressure from the church’s building debt. Third, while “being a community of believers that truly reflects the spirit of Christ in all we do”—typically more a statement of what the church is called to “be”—and “continuously grow[ing] in faith and spiritual maturity”—typically classified as spiritual formation—are listed in the

⁴⁸ Green, “Our Core Values.”

mission section, the clear emphasis is upon a more traditional emphasis in mission—to reach those outside of Christ. Furthermore, even the “education” of the church is seen as helping people see that this outward focus is their mission.

Finally, the mission of reaching those outside of Christ and the mission elements of “serve others” and “share the story of Jesus Christ,” with Christ as the model, combine to be nearly identical to the missional outreach strategy that has been named in this paper of seeking the lost, serving the community, and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. The 2006 congregational survey showed that many aspects of this mission were of high importance to the church; however, the church at that time had a healthy dissatisfaction in the church’s completion of this mission.⁴⁹ Taken together, the “Core Values” brochure and congregational questionnaire results show that, while the High Pointe Church of Christ was either little involved or not very successful in local outreach before I arrived in 2008, there was a very significant portion of the congregation that strongly desired to grow as a church in this area and could therefore be open to a missional outreach strategy. Challenges for implantation of this strategy include the tension between the older, rural roots of the congregation and the new younger, suburban majority, historical distrust of the leadership of the church, and the congregation’s building debt, which makes sending resources outside a perceived threat.

⁴⁹ In the survey, in regards to seeking the lost, 92 percent ranked “encouraging members to view their daily life and work as a place for ministry” as very important or important; however, only 45 percent ranked this as a very high level or high level of satisfaction. As to serving the community, 77 percent ranked “involvement in community issues” as very important or important. Despite this level of importance, only 49 percent ranked this very high or high in satisfaction in this area of ministry. Furthermore, 91 percent ranked “carrying out acts of charity to needy persons” as being very important or important; however, only 67 percent ranked a very high level or high level of satisfaction in this area of ministry. In the category of sharing the good news, 80 percent ranked “sharing the good news with the unchurched” as very important, the highest of all the outreach markers; however, only 5 percent had a very high level of satisfaction with this aspect of mission, the lowest of all satisfaction levels for the outreach markers. See Green, *High Pointe Congregational Survey*, 30-37.

CHAPTER 2

LARGER CONTEXT

While understanding the congregation's history and congregational makeup is important in implementing a missional outreach strategy, so too is understanding a congregation's larger context for ministry. This chapter will examine the geographic and demographic data of the suburb of McKinney, general characteristics of suburbia (including areas of brokenness), and the current post-Christendom, postmodern context.

Geographic and Demographic Data of McKinney

The city of McKinney is an outer ring suburb of North Dallas in Collin County which, according to the 2010 United States census data, grew at a rapid pace from 2000 to 2010. The most explosive growth was in northern Collin county (which High Pointe draws from), where "towns including Prosper, Murphy and Anna grew between 350 percent and almost 600 percent."¹ From 2000 to 2010, the city of McKinney itself grew from 54,369 to 131,117, an increase of 141 percent.²

¹ Michael E. Young and Ryan McNeill, "Population Growth Surging around Dallas, Other Texas Cities, Census Figures Show," *Dallas Morning News*, February 17, 2011.

² City of McKinney, "McKinney Population Grows 141 Percent in 10 Years According to Recent Census Data," North Texas e-News http://www.ntxe-news.com/artman/publish/article_68120.shtml (accessed March 9, 2011).

The city of McKinney and Collin County have shown a growing racial diversity over the last ten years and “suburban areas aren’t strictly the Anglo bastions they were.” From 2000-2010, Collin County’s black population increased 178 percent (from 23,000 to 65,000), the Hispanic population increased 128 percent (from 50,000 to 115,000), and the Asian population increased 157 percent (from 24,000 to 87,000).³ In 2010, the United States census data shows the city McKinney has a racial breakdown of 64.5 percent (84,547) Non-Hispanic White, 18.6 percent (24,406) Hispanic, 10.2 percent (13,416) African-American, 4 percent (5,244) Asian, and 2.4 percent other.⁴

Despite the high growth and changing demographics of the area, the quality of life in McKinney is ranked high both by outside observers as well as residents. *CNN/Money* magazine ranks McKinney as the number five “best places to live” in the United States, a designation that is proudly displayed on various street corners across the city.⁵ McKinney residents agree with the assessment, as 97 percent of residents surveyed said that they were “satisfied or extremely satisfied with the quality of life in McKinney.”⁶

Areas of Brokenness in Suburbia

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, one key to missional outreach is ministering to people as Jesus did in their areas of brokenness. There are three areas of brokenness in

³ Young and McNeill, "Population Growth Surging around Dallas.”

⁴ "Hispanic or Latino, and Not Hispanic or Latino by Race 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File," http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_10_PL_P2&prodType=table (accessed March 9, 2011).

⁵ Vanessa Richardson, "Best Places to Live: Money's List of America's Best Small Cities," *CNN/Money Magazine*, <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bplive/2010/snapshots/PL4845744.html> (accessed March 9, 2011).

⁶ City of McKinney, "Residents Agree McKinney Is One of Best Places to Live" (accessed March 9, 2011).

people's lives that, while present in many Americans' lives, are particularly acute in suburbia: 1) isolation/lack of community; 2) busyness/lack of time; and 3) materialism/lack of peace. Each of these areas of brokenness is discussed below.

Isolation/Lack of Community

The suburbs are popularly thought of as residential areas outside of a city; however, while commercial free areas have been developed through zoning laws, demographers define the suburbs more broadly as “the non-central city parts of metropolitan areas.”⁷ Despite popular perception, suburbs are not necessarily just filled with workers who commute into central parts of cities. A major part of suburban expansion was led by industries that relocated to the periphery of cities, and workers and residents followed.⁸ Today the suburbs are major economic powerhouses, employing tens of millions of workers. In addition, the suburbs have always been associated with consumerism, as represented by the malls and strips malls within the suburbs. Indeed, materialistic hopes and dreams have been a huge part of the draw of the suburbs, making it difficult to separate the suburbs from their economic power and allure. The suburbs can thus be defined as the non-central residential, commercial, and industrial areas outside of a metropolis.⁹

⁷ Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York City: Vintage Books, 2003), 3. I first began to write about areas of brokenness in suburbia and how the missional church could address these areas in 2006. See James Nored, “Missional Engagement in Suburbia” (a paper written for the course, “TM710: The Local Congregation as a Missional Outpost,” Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006).

⁸ See Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1984), 267.

⁹ For a history of the use of the term “suburb” and the various ways that the term has been defined, see Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 1-13. Jackson indicates that the suburbs are as “old as civilization.”

The term “suburbia,” in contrast, is more of a sociological designation, and usually evokes the image of endless rows of nearly identical houses. This image is largely a result of the mass produced homes of the 1960s, the setting of numerous sitcoms of that era such as *Leave It to Beaver*. Through various polemics, both in religious and non-religious circles, suburbia has also come to represent an empty and soulless existence. In this paper the terms “suburbs” and “suburbia” are used interchangeably, referring both to the residential, commercial, and industrial areas outside of a metropolis, as well as the emptiness associated with these areas.

As the biblical story reveals (as will be discussed in Chapter 3), we are made to live in “community.” While various sociological understandings of community have existed, over time, community has come to be equated with “territory, social system, and a sense of belonging.”¹⁰ That is, community, at least in part, is about a shared set of weak and strong ties or relationships with a particular group of people in a particular place, and this is how God created humans to exist; however, Americans increasingly are living in isolation and thus experiencing a loss of community.¹¹

In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam traces the collapse of social capital and social connections among Americans over the last thirty to forty years. The results of his research are staggering. Almost every form of social engagement, both formal and informal, has dropped significantly during this time, including entertaining in one’s

¹⁰ Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online: We Are One in the Network* (New York: P. Lang, 2005), 27. For a discussion of the history of various views of community by sociologists, see John G. Bruhn, *The Sociology of Community Connections* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2004), 42-48.

¹¹ In this context, it is meant that Americans are suffering a loss of sociological community. That Americans are suffering a loss of biblical community with God and others is, of course, true as well.

home, picnicking, night life, card playing, and eating in full-service restaurants.¹² The amount of time that spouses spend in meaningful conversation is somewhere around four minutes per day, and parent-to-child interaction is about the same amount.¹³ The number of Americans who now live alone has also increased dramatically in recent decades.¹⁴ The end result of this decline in social interaction is that Americans in general have few close relationships, causing numerous physical and mental health problems.¹⁵ The isolation of suburbanites is particularly acute and has been contributed to by many additional factors.

First, suburbanites suffer from a lack of social infrastructure within neighborhoods. The authors of *Suburban Nation* state, “To begin with the obvious, community cannot form in the absence of communal space, without places for people to get together to talk.”¹⁶ Unfortunately, common places and communal spaces are difficult to find in suburbia. The invention of the automobile—so beloved by most all Americans today—led to this loss of social infrastructure, engendering changes to home, street, and the neighborhood itself. In the pre-automobile society, the “street” was actually a wide open space and a place of significant social interaction; however, by the 1920s, the street

¹² Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York City: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 100-104.

¹³ Richard A. Swenson, *Margin* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 154.

¹⁴ In 1940, less than 8 percent of Americans lived alone. In 2010, according to the 2010 US Census, 27 percent of Americans live alone. See "Unmarried and Single Americans Week: Sept. 19-25, 2010," http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb10-ff18.html (April 9, 2011).

¹⁵ Bruhn, *The Sociology of Community Connections*, 1.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Andres Duany, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000), 69.

was taken over by automobiles and was no longer safe for recreational activity.¹⁷

Modern-day streets have been widened and the wide streets and intersections make walking in the neighborhood less desirable.¹⁸

Of course, even if the streets in neighborhoods were narrower and safer, the problem is that there is no place to walk to—again, no common place. Ray Oldenburg, in his book, *The Great Good Place*, lays out the concept of the “third place” as the best type of common place. Third places are those environments in which people meet to develop friendships, discuss issues, and interact with others.¹⁹ These third places used to be common in American communities, with a local pub or café within easy walking distance of most homes and on virtually every street. Unfortunately, in suburbia, third places are not only scarce, they are often illegal; that is, they are literally zoned out of existence, with residential and commercial districts being separated as far as possible. Rather than being recognized for the great social good that they do, third places are often viewed as a threat to the safety and security of suburbia. Since suburbanites view their homes (first places) as fortresses (safe retreats from the busy world), and their workplaces (second places) are not only far away but have massive productivity pressures that are not

¹⁷ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 164-65.

¹⁸ “In the absence of walkable public places—streets, squares, and parks, the public realm—people of diverse ages, races, and beliefs are unlikely to meet and talk” Andres Duany, 60. Kenneth T. Jackson, author of *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, articulates the problem well: “The real shift . . . is the way in which our lives are now centered inside the house, rather than on the neighborhood or the community. With increased use of automobiles, the life of the sidewalk and the front yard has largely disappeared, and the social intercourse that used to be the main characteristic of urban life has vanished.” Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 279-280.

¹⁹ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1989), 20-42.

conducive to meaningful conversation, this lack of third places in suburbia contributes substantially to the continued isolation of suburbanites.²⁰

A second and closely related cause of isolation in suburbia is the fractionalization of suburbanites' lives. Again, the automobile has much to do with this condition. When Congress passed the Interstate Highway Act in 1956, the United States government began building a massive, federally subsidized highway system which would increase the rate of suburbanization and isolation dramatically. The highway system allowed suburbs to be built further and further away from the city's center, causing suburbanites to spend more time alone in their cars—which is itself an isolating event. Meanwhile, the automobile allowed suburbanites to eat, sleep, shop, and entertain themselves in places far away from their homes. This has given rise to what Jackson calls the “drive-in culture” of contemporary America, a culture of motels, fast-food restaurants, superstores, and shopping malls where people do not see anyone they know.²¹

Because of the automobile, suburbanites now work, sleep, eat, shop, go to school, enjoy entertainment, and worship in entirely different locales. Those with whom they often spend the most time, their co-workers, may live more than an hour away. If they meet an interesting person in a restaurant or at some entertainment event, the chances are

²⁰ Before industrialization, first and second places were one. Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, 16.

²¹ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 246-71. The “third place” diner was replaced by the likes of McDonald's; the local mom and pop grocery store was replaced by the likes of Albertson's and then Super Wal-Mart and Super Target; and the local hardware store was replaced by the likes of Sutherlands and eventually Home Depot and Lowe's. These franchises are built upon speed, efficiency, convenience and predictability, and they are often staffed with part-time and temporary workers who themselves drive in to work and have a high-turnover rate. Local based stores, where a person regularly goes, gets to know the owners and other shoppers, and that promote a sense of community, are largely gone. To read about this “McDonalldization,” see George Ritzer, *The Mcdonalldization of Society* 6, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: Pine Forge, 2011).

that they may never see that person again.²² Furthermore, suburbs at the outermost periphery of growth—now called exurbs—which require the most commute continue to increase in popularity.²³ The homesteads in exurbia are on large, multi-acre tracts, and these tracts are designed to provide privacy and keep the neighbors away. Isolation in this growing type of suburb is thus even greater. When the totality of the effects of the automobile upon suburbanites is compiled, it is hard to underestimate.

A third cause of isolation among suburbanites is the invention of air conditioning and television. The mass production of air conditioners in homes in the 1950s helped boost the sale of homes in the South and other hot areas, increasing suburban expansion. Air conditioning also drove millions of Americans off of their front porches and inside their homes. If this were not enough allure, the wide spread ownership and use of television in the 1950s had the same effect.²⁴ As with other consumeristic trends, television and suburbia have gone hand in hand since television's invention. Television shows took place in suburban dream homes, and suburban homes were promoted as having the latest technological advances, including television.

A fourth and often overlooked factor that contributes to the isolation of suburbanites is the geographic instability of these residents. According to the 2010 US

²² Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 265.

²³ By the end of the 1990s, exurbia “accounted for more than 30 percent of the land in the contiguous forty-eight states and was home to 60 million Americans.” See Robert Bruegmann, *Sprawl: A Compact History* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), 84.

²⁴ According to Neilson Media Research, in 1950, 3.88 million (9 percent) American households had a television. In one year (1951) this number nearly tripled to 10.3 million (23.5 percent). By 1962 television ownership had reached 48.9 million (90.0 percent). This phenomenal growth in television ownership demonstrates the fascination that Americans have had for television. See Neilson Media Center, “Number of Tv Households in America,” http://www.tvhistory.tv/Annual_TV_Households_50-78.JPG (accessed June 3, 2007).

Census, 12.5 percent of Americans move each year.²⁵ While a 12.5 percent turnover rate per year might not sound extremely high, the perception and often reality of suburbanites is that either they or the neighbors will likely move soon because of job changes, a desire for more affordable housing, or a desire for better homes or schools. The result of this perceived instability is that there is little incentive for busy suburbanites to take the time to befriend their neighbors.²⁶ In short, suburbia, for all of its hype as the perfect community, is a lonely place.

Busyness/Lack of Time

The writer of Ecclesiastes states, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (3:1). In suburbia, however, time and season are grossly out of balance. Few would say that they have “time for everything,” for between 70 and 80 percent of Americans in general say that they sometimes or always feel rushed.²⁷ Furthermore, while suburban families are seemingly engaged in “every activity under heaven,” in reality the preponderance of activity is unbalanced in scope.

It might be assumed that Americans feel busier today than in the past because of an increased work load. The data on America labor statistics, however, paints a mixed picture. According to the 2010 United States Census Bureau, Americans work on average

²⁵ "U.S. Census Bureau Reports Residents Moved More in 2009," <http://reloroundtable.com/blog/news/u-s-census-bureau-reports-residents-moved-more-in-2009/> (accessed April 9, 2011).

²⁶ Oldenburg states, “Some of the few good friends will move and are not easily replaced. In time, the overtures toward friendship, neighborliness, and a semblance of community hardly seem worth the effort.” Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, 8.

²⁷ Central Statistics Office, "2000 Us Census Bureau Statistics of Hours of Work," <http://www.gov.mu/portal/sites/ncb/cso/ei365/intro.htm> (accessed May 8, 2007).

38.4 hours per week.²⁸ This marks a decrease since the 1960s; however, this statistic does not tell the full story. Bumsoo Lee, Peter Gordon, and Harry W. Richardson give a fuller picture of societal changes in these decades, stating: “Recent decades have witnessed a significant increase in married families in which both spouses work, from 36 percent in 1970 to 60 percent in 2000, as well as a dramatic rise in single-parent families, from 11 percent of total families in 1970 to almost 25 percent of total families in 2000.”²⁹

In addition, according to data from the United States Census Bureau, nationwide commute times have risen from 22.4 minutes in 1990 to 25.5 minutes in 2000, a 14.1 percent increase.³⁰ Furthermore, American workers feel a significant increase in “psychological busyness” and its resultant stress as employers demand greater and greater productivity with fewer resources and in a lesser amount of time. Multi-tasking, an essential skill for today’s employees, is also a major source of stress in the workplace, as workers are constantly interrupted.³¹ So while raw work hours per individual may have decreased slightly, families on average have a much greater percentage of their time devoted to work, with longer commutes and more stressful workloads.

²⁸ U. S. Census, "Census Bureau Releases 2009 American Community Survey Data," http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/american_community_survey_acs/cb10-cn78.html (accessed April 10, 2011).

²⁹ Bumsoo Lee, Peter Gordon, Harry W. Richardson, "Travel Trends in US Cities: Explaining the 2000 Census Commuting Results," Lusk Center for Real Estate, University of Southern California <http://www-rcf.usc.edu/~pgordon/pdf/commuting.pdf> (accessed May 9, 2007). In 2009 there were 11.6 million single parents living with their children. U. S. Census, "Unmarried and Single Americans Week: Sept. 19-25, 2010."

³⁰ Edward M. Hallowell, *Crazybusy* (New York City: Ballantine Books, 2006), 105. Dallas, Texas has the worst commute in the nation. See Michael A. Lindenberger, "Commutes in Dallas-Fort Worth Are Worst in U.S., Study Says," *Dallas Morning News*, <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/transportation/20101215-commutes-in-dallas-fort-worth-are-worst-in-u.s.-study-says.ece> (accessed January 1, 2011).

³¹ One study reported that 54 percent of workers felt overwhelmed at some time in the last month due to the amount of work that they were required to complete. Hallowell, *Crazybusy*, 147.

Busyness is also a result of how Americans use their “leisure time.” Rather than resting, sharing unstructured family time, visiting with friends, and building relationships, Americans fill their leisure time with television viewing (an average of 2.5 hours per day) and a hyperactive calendar of activities.³² The latter is particularly true for suburbanites, who enroll their children in an endless array of sports, music, art, dance, and educational programs in an effort to have their children realize their potential and to ensure that their children do not “get behind.” Driving children from one practice, game, or event to another leaves both the busy “soccer parent” and the child exhausted and frazzled from the stress of traffic, rush, and competition.³³ This all results in a “stunning 37 percent decline in the amount of ‘unstructured’ free time, from 52 to 33 hours per week.”³⁴ Ten-year-old Stephanie Mazzaro says, “I don’t have time to be a kid.”³⁵

The question is, since much of this busyness for adults is self-inflicted, what drives the compulsion to hyperactivity? What is the brokenness in the human condition that leads to this harmful behavior? The reasons for this behavior are numerous, but include a rampant individualism;³⁶ a desire to maintain or gain status in the eyes of others

³² Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York City: Vintage Books, 2000), 172.

³³ Research confirms that the distribution of time for young children has changed dramatically in recent years. *Ibid.*, 169, 171.

³⁴ Archibald D. Hart, *Adrenaline and Stress: The Exciting New Breakthrough That Helps You Overcome Stress Damage* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1995), 82.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ See J. Nelson Jennings’ chapter on “Suburban Evangelical Individualism: Syncretism or Contextualization” in Gailyn Van Rhee, *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents*, Evangelical Missiological Society Series, vol. 13 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006), 159-75.

or in one's own eyes;³⁷ an addiction to adrenaline and technology;³⁸ an excuse to avoid people or the problems of life;³⁹ a lack of direction in one's life;⁴⁰ and chasing after material things. The chasing after material things is not only a cause of busyness, but it is also a source of brokenness in its own right. It is to this third form of brokenness in suburbia that this chapter now turns.

Materialism/Lack of Purpose

God created humanity and has given us a purpose—to share in his mission; however, the tremendous popularity of Rick Warren's *the Purpose-Driven Life* has shown that Americans have little sense of purpose in life.⁴¹ They feel empty. This is no less true in suburbia. In fact, emptiness or lack of purpose is a tremendous source of brokenness in “typical suburbia,” a brokenness that is caused by materialism.⁴²

Materialism is the pursuit of money and material things in order to find purpose, meaning, and identity in life. In short, it is idolatry—worshiping something other than the

³⁷ See the popular level but insightful book, David L. Goetz, *Death by Suburb: How to Keep the Suburbs from Killing Your Soul* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

³⁸ Dr. Archibald Hart states that “it is actually possible for us to become addicted to our own adrenaline!” Hart, *Adrenaline and Stress*, quoted in Hollowell, *Crazybusy*, 90-91.

³⁹ Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 32.

⁴⁰ When people do not know why they exist, they will chase after anything and everything, searching for something to give their lives meaning.

⁴¹ Richard Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

⁴² The term “typical suburbia” refers to the commonly held perception that that the suburbs are the bastion of the upper middle-class, with no poor to be found; however, while this is obviously true in many neighborhoods and suburbs, overall the perception is incomplete. The Brookings Institute reported that in 2005 “the suburban poor outnumbered their city counterparts by at least 1 million,” and that the poverty rate in the suburbs was 9.4 percent. See Eyal Press, “The New Suburban Poverty,” *The Nation* <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070423/press> (accessed June 3, 2007).

God of heaven. Many Americans today are not formally worshipping God at all, and materialism is their only god; however, for decades Americans have engaged in syncretistic worship of both the God of heaven and material things. In 1869, Catharine Beecher urged women to take charge of the suburban house and family, which she called the "church of Jesus Christ."⁴³ In 1921, an editorial writer in the *National Real Estate Journal* told readers that the Garden of Eden was the first subdivision. In the 1940s, ad writers for General Electric promoted purchasing a home as "an adventure in happiness."⁴⁴ Much evidence exists that Americans are "buying" into the idea that has been sold for decades that the home can fulfill spiritual longings. For instance, the average size of a new home grew from approximately 1000 square feet at the end of World War II to nearly 2500 square feet by the end of the twentieth century.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the number of people per household has shrunk dramatically during this time, from 3.14 persons per household in 1970 to 2.63 persons per household in 1990.⁴⁶ This results in a combined increase of 300 percent of square footage per person. Suburbanites—in part due to their isolation and boredom—then began to devote enormous amounts of time and money to their homes.⁴⁷

⁴³ Hayden, 6. Thomas M. Kando, *Leisure and Popular Culture in Transition*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis, MO: C.V. Mosby Company, 1980). In 1891, an ad for a house in a Chicago subdivision portrayed an angel offering a house for just \$10 a month. See Albert Y. Hsu, *The Suburban Christian: Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 35.

⁴⁴ Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 131.

⁴⁵ Bruegmann, *Sprawl*, 60.

⁴⁶ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 285.

⁴⁷ Kando, *Leisure and Popular Culture in Transition*, 101. Alan Berube and Elizabeth Kneebone state, "Leisure has been perverted into consumption." See Alan Berube and Elizabeth Kneebone, "Two Steps Back: City and Suburban Poverty Trends 1999-2005," Brookings Institute <http://www.brook.edu/>

In the materialistic worldview, shopping itself becomes a spiritual quest and an all-important religious ritual.⁴⁸ In his book, *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping*, Paco Underhill details the shopping habits of both men and women. In one section, he upholds the spiritual nature of shopping, stating that there is nothing superficial about the female relationship with consumption, for “the products you buy turn you into that other, idealized version of yourself. That dress makes you beautiful, this lipstick makes you kissable, that lamp turns your house into an elegant showplace.”⁴⁹ This endless consumptive cycle—for both men and women—can only bring emptiness.⁵⁰

Ministry in a Post-Christendom and Postmodern Context

Christendom formally began when the Roman Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Empire.⁵¹ Prior to this declaration, Christians were on the margins of society. Now they were at the center, giving counsel to the emperor. State power was used to give Christians places to assemble, tax breaks to clergy, and to eliminate other religions. Laws were passed to enforce morality, and Sundays became official days off. Infant baptism was practiced, and eventually all

metro/pubs/20061205_citysuburban.htm (accessed 6-03-07 2007). See also Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York City: Persus, 1946).

⁴⁸ Hirsch says, “Much of what goes by the name *advertising* is an explicit offer of a sense of identity, meaning, purpose, and community”—all religious/spiritual concepts. Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 107.

⁴⁹ Underhill, *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping* (New York City, Simon & Schuster, 2000), 117.

⁵⁰ Americans have made the pursuit of material things a spiritual exercise, and even religious expression has been commoditized. See Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 64.

⁵¹ For a summary of the “Christendom Shift,” see Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004), 74-108.

citizens of the Empire were assumed to be “Christian.” Discipleship was lowered, and nominalism and immorality amongst clergy and laity became common. The distinctions between church, world, and kingdom were eliminated, and mission became maintenance.

Post-Christendom, on the other hand, is not pre-Christendom. It is the world after Christendom, the world that still remembers Christendom and has rejected it. Stuart Murray, author of *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*, defines post-Christendom as “the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitely shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.”⁵² In this world, the church is at the margins of society, with little political power. A Christian worldview can no longer be assumed, and pluralism is on the rise. Days and times and structures no longer revolve around Christian schedules and calendars, and according to one researcher, weekly church attendance in the United States currently stands at somewhere around 17.5 percent.⁵³ The need for mission in this culture is great.

Postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. Modernism began with the Enlightenment, which emphasized knowledge and confidence in discovering truth through empirical means. From the 1800s and up until the beginning of the twentieth century, there was great optimism and the belief that humanity was progressing and “evolving” into a better species through science and the scientific method. This

⁵² Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 19.

⁵³ David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 28. People self-report weekly church attendance of 40 percent or higher, but studies of actual attendance reports indicate that weekly church attendance is much lower.

humanistic and scientific mythos, however, came crashing down in the twentieth century from the onslaught of two world wars, the Holocaust, endless political scandal, divorce, AIDS, and a host of societal ills. On the positive side, modernism believed in absolute truth, but it also bred pride, intolerance, and judgmentalism. Furthermore, Christians could not even agree on what was true.⁵⁴

In response, postmodernism: 1) is skeptical of certainty and power; 2) is wary of all over-arching metanarratives and worldviews; 3) believes that truth is contextual, shaped by language, and in the eye of the beholder; 4) values subjective experience; and 5) is at ease with seeming paradox and contradiction.⁵⁵ The High Pointe Church of Christ therefore finds itself seeking to fulfill its mission in a post-Christendom, postmodern environment, which necessitates the development and implementation of a new missional outreach strategy.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ For a concise introduction and historical overview of the development of postmodernism, see Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). Also see Robert Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

⁵⁵ See Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 159.

⁵⁶ The term “postmodern” may have first appeared in the 1870s, referencing a painting that went beyond the recent French Impressionism of that time. The term was used rather sparingly and diversely through the first half of the twentieth century, coming to more prominence in the 1970s as it was used to describe certain architectural trends. See Ihab Habib Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1987), 12. The term “postmodern” has now been applied to a wide variety of cultural phenomenon, including art, theater, fiction, television, and music, where, as in architecture, various styles and eras are recombined and forms are broken. Postmodern social theorist Jean Baudrillard says that every possible form and function of art has been created, and that the universe has exhausted itself.” See Jean Baudrillard, “On Nihilism,” *On the Beach*, Spring, no. 6 (1984): 19-25., quoted in Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, Communications and Culture (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan, 1991). Postmodernism is also a philosophy which owes much to thinkers and writers such as Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard. These philosophers rejected the Enlightenment pursuit of truth and sought to question all of their assumptions, “deconstructing” them. More will be said about postmodernism, particularly how the gospel is to be shared in a postmodern context, in Chapter 7.

PART TWO
FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 3

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR A MISSIONAL CHURCH

Over the course of two thousand years, there have been various understandings of the Church's purpose. The understanding of the Church that is taking hold today, however, is the missional church, an understanding that this paper supports as well. The purpose of this section is lay out the foundation for a missional understanding of the Church based upon the missional nature of Scripture, the missional nature of God, and Jesus' missional life and ministry.

There are several different ways to determine the Church's mission. The first way to determine the Church's mission is to look at Scriptural propositions for passages that explicitly define or illustrate the Church's mission. The dangers inherent in such an approach used by itself, however, are by now obvious to the postmodern mind. Propositions, while seeming to be clear, are subject to wild misinterpretation, extreme cultural bias, and eisegesis. Furthermore, this approach to understanding the Church's mission has led to a much greater reliance upon certain missional passages for the Church's missional mandate than is warranted. For instance, for all of its importance, the Great Commission—often used in churches for the sole basis of mission and “beaten like

a drum”—is never directly quoted or referenced outside of the Gospels and Acts. Despite this lack of repetition, the early Church clearly was missional in orientation, as the story of the early Church shows. There must be something more to the basis for a missional church theology.

The second approach to determining the Church’s mission is to look at the sending nature and character of God (the *missio Dei*), and to define the Church’s mission in light of this understanding. This is an excellent approach; however, if one seeks to determine God’s sending nature and mission by looking only at propositional statements on this, the same problems of misinterpretation, bias, eisegesis, and over-emphasis arise. A true understanding of God and his mission, and therefore the Church’s mission, must have as its starting point the narrative of Scripture. When this is understood, then Scriptural propositions on the Church’s mission may be properly understood.

The Missional Narrative of Scripture

There have been numerous works that provide a biblical basis for mission.¹ It is the overall story told, however, that provides the proper understanding of God, his mission, and the Church’s role. As Arthur F. Glasser and Charles Edward van Engen write in *Announcing the Kingdom*, “The whole Bible, both Old and new Testaments, is a

¹ For a list of these works, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 33. Also see Charles Edward van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids.: Baker Books, 1996), 35-44. A notable recent work is Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter Thomas O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

missionary book.”² In *The Mission of God*, author Christopher J. Wright asserts that rather than looking at the biblical basis for mission, one ought to look at the missional basis of the Bible. Indeed, he asserts that “*the whole Bible itself is a missional phenomenon.*”³ He proposes a missional hermeneutic that “proceeds from the assumption that *the whole Bible renders to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of the whole of God’s creation.*”⁴ Taking this hermeneutic as a starting point, it would seem appropriate, then, to examine the overall biblical narrative before proceeding to look at God’s missional nature and the Church’s mission. This process is a form of “narrative theology,” in which God is discussed and understood in light of a narrative or story.⁵

Space does not permit the full retelling of the story of Scripture; however, a retelling of the beginning and end of the story is particularly helpful. In his book, *The Essence of the Church*, Craig van Gelder states,

The biblical story has four unique chapters: Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22. These chapters are unique in that no sin is present in the places and events described. Genesis 1-2 gives of a picture of God’s creative design, what the world was like before sin entered the scene. Revelation 21-22 gives us a picture of God’s future intent, what the world will be like once

² Arthur F. Glasser and Charles Edward van Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 17.

³ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 22.

⁴ Ibid., 51. See also David Bosch, “Hermeneutical Principles in the Biblical Foundation for Mission,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17 (1993): 439-40. Bosch points out the inherent dangers in proof-texting passages on mission. As important as these texts are, they do not equate to a missional hermeneutic.

⁵ For a discussion of narrative theology and story as it relates to Scripture, see Van Engen, *Mission on the Way*, 44-68. For a fuller discussion of narrative and story in this paper, also see Chapter 7.

redemption has been fully completed with consummation of the judgment of sin and the evil.⁶

Here, then, is a summary of these most important chapters.

The biblical narrative states, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gn 1:1). God is assumed to have always existed, and he is the initiator in all of life. As we will see, this initiatory nature of God points toward his initiatory activity in mission as well. Despite God’s eternal nature, however, it is clear that the story begins when God creates the world and all that is in it. The implication is that God has a strong desire to partner with his creation, and that our story is inseparable from God’s story. Whatever history God has apart from us is neither conceivable nor apparently relevant to the current human condition. Our history—and our story—begins with God.

In the first six days, God creates the sun, the moon, the stars, land, sea, plants and trees, birds, creeping things, and animals. After each day, the biblical writer makes the point that “God saw that it was good.” After creating Adam and Eve, “God saw that it was very good.” This fundamental goodness of God’s creation, including the world and humanity, is a foundational truth and the starting point for the biblical narrative.⁷ Indeed, Adam and Eve are made in the very image of God. There is no higher status.

There is but one thing in the creation account that is not good. It is “not good for the man to be alone.” This deficiency in the man’s state is quickly amended, as God forms a woman out of Adam’s ribs. By forming Eve out of Adam’s side, the inter-relationship between man and woman is profoundly demonstrated. If there were any

⁶ Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 89-90.

⁷ Unfortunately, too many evangelicals begin biblical discussions in Genesis 3, talking about sin and humanity’s “fallen state,” failing to realize that Scripture has a Genesis 1-2.

doubt, the biblical writer says that a man and a woman come together to form “one flesh.” Also, by delaying the creation of Eve, God is showing Adam that he needs other humans (a community) in his life.

In the beginning, then, humanity exists in perfect community with God and one another. God walks and lives amongst them in the Garden of Eden, symbolizing the closeness that they have with him. Adam is filled with joy at the sight of Eve, crying out “bone of my bones” and “flesh of my flesh.” There is no discord or rancor in their relationship. Adam is given meaningful work in the garden, providing him purpose in life. All of their physical needs are met, with every tree in the garden except one available for their sustenance. God gives them dominion over all the earth, a status which in itself is nearly godlike. In fact, this is one of the points of the story, that God is creating a people, made in his image, to be co-rulers over creation. At present it is a small community—just God, Adam, and Eve—but Eve’s name as “mother of all living things” points toward a future, much larger community. God has wondrous plans for his people, plans that exist on a global scale. This beautiful picture of God and humanity in perfect community in Genesis 1-2 shows God’s original intent for creation.

Revelation 21-22 shows God’s ultimate intent for creation, which begins with creating a “new heavens and a new earth.” This is in part a restoration of the community that was in the Garden of Eden, as is illustrated in John’s words,

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rv 21:3-4)

In this restored community, God and humanity will once again live and dwell together. In this fair state, “no longer will there be any curse.” The curse that ruined the earth, humanity, and humanity’s relationship with God will be gone.

Yet, the new heavens and the new earth is more than a mere restoration. Eden was crossed by four rivers, but in the new heavens and earth there is a river of life. The tree of life, once forbidden to Adam and Eve, now spans the river of life, with its leaves available for the healing of the nations. Living water is not forbidden either, but it is freely given for all to drink. In Genesis, Adam and Eve were two persons, a lone couple living with God in a garden. In Revelation, there is the image of a multi-cultural city, with a people of God who represent every nation, tribe, and tongue on earth. Adam and Eve were joined together by God, but in the new heavens and new earth, the church as the bride of Christ is joined to the Lamb of God. Adam and Eve were given dominion over the earth and worked in the Garden, but then (and now!) God’s people reign with God and the lamb, and they serve God. Revelation ends with an invitation from the Spirit and the bride offering life to all who would drink it, and a call for Christ to come quickly. It is a call to make this mission of God in this world complete and fully realized.

From looking at the beginning and end of the story, it would seem that God’s overall mission includes at least three things. The first aspect of his mission is to redeem his creation. This includes the elimination of death, disease, decay, destruction, and all forms of evil. The second aspect of his mission is to redeem humanity. This includes the elimination of suffering, mourning, tears, pain, sin or death. It also means shaping God’s people back into the image of God. “The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all

liars,” as well as those who do shameful and deceitful deeds, will be cast out (Rv 21:8). Those deeds and character traits are inconsistent with God’s nature and the nature of his people, who have been transformed. They are now at peace with God and one another, living in perfect community. The third aspect of his mission is to have humanity join him in his kingdom rule or reign. This is expressed through the marriage of Christ and the church, the overt references to reign, and the service and worship that God’s people offer up in this vision. The Spirit and the bride (the church) offer this invitation.⁸ Wright bases the church’s mission on this overall mission of God, stating that “our mission . . . means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.”⁹

All the rest of Scripture is the story of God fulfilling his mission through Christ. There are many mini-narratives within this story, with individuals as well as Israel, but they each contribute to this missional metanarrative.¹⁰ Jesus gives the hermeneutical key to Scripture at his post-resurrection appearance—himself (Lk 24:45-46). Scripture, Jesus says, is about him. This particular passage points towards one part of Jesus’ mission, his suffering and resurrection. It also points towards an offer of repentance and forgiveness of sins that his suffering and resurrection makes possible, an offer that will begin in Jerusalem and spread outward towards all nations. This sweeping, expansive mission is

⁸ Arthur Glasser states that Revelation “has but one central purpose. It is to declare that the Kingdom of God is triumphant today, will triumph throughout time, and will be so revealed in eternity.” Glasser and Van Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 361.

⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 23.

¹⁰ Postmodernism rejects all metanarratives as inherently oppressive and geared only towards one view point; however, because of its composition of mini-narratives, Scripture anticipates many of these concerns. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 27.

reflective of the overall mission of God as is found in the biblical narrative, which is also wide, vast, and all-encompassing. Having come now to Jesus in this discussion, it would be appropriate to turn to the missional nature of God (*missio Dei*).

The Missional Nature of God

“Mission is the mother of theology,” said systematic theologian Martin Mauger in 1908. Despite this well-cited truism, for years missiology was viewed as a subset of ecclesiology or practical theology, relegated to a minor role.¹¹ However, thanks to the contributions of theologians and scholars such as Carl Barth,¹² Lesslie Newbigin,¹³ and David Bosch,¹⁴ missiology is now being seen as a fundamental part of theology proper. An increasing number of scholars, in fact, see all theology as missional theology.¹⁵ This is a hopeful development for the future, but at this point, Van Gelder confirms the fact that at least the *missio Dei* “has now become a shared starting point for various streams of

¹¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489-96. Guder, *Missional Church*, 7. Gailyn Van Rheenen, “Monthly Missiological Reflection #21: The Missiological Foundations of Theology,” <http://www.missiology.org/mmr/mmr21.htm> (accessed April 1, 2011). In fact, the entire field of missiology is only approximately one hundred years old, and in the beginning it dealt entirely with overseas missions and the sending of missionaries from the “Christian” West to the pagans across the sea. See Darrell L. Guder, “Missional Theology for a Missionary Church,” *Journal for Preachers* 22, no. 1 (1998): 4. Even as recent a work as Stanley Grenz’s *Theology for the Community of God*, an otherwise excellent work, gives a scant eleven pages to mission. Mission is relegated to “outreach” and is one of many ministries of the Church. While Grenz has much that is commendable, it is a classic case of a failure to incorporate God’s economy into his being; that is, who God is should be inseparable from his actions. Therefore, one cannot merely define God as “being” community without incorporating God’s movement in mission as part of who he is. He is the God of mission—the *missio Dei*.

¹² For Barth’s contributions, see Guder, “Missional Theology,” 5.

¹³ See Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

¹⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*.

¹⁵ Guder, “Missional Theology,” 5.

missiology.”¹⁶ While there is some diversity in thought on the overall scope of the meaning of *missio Dei*, this concept always emphasizes the “sending” action of God.

In Guder’s seminal work, *Missional Church*, the contributing authors take on the task of defining the Church’s missional role in North America. They note the decline of Christendom and Christianity in North America and seek to revitalize the Church in this continent. In this revitalization, they begin with the *missio Dei*:

We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation. “Mission” means “sending,” and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history We have come to speak of God as a “missionary God.” Thus we have learned to understand the church as a “sent people.”¹⁷

The most explicit passages that link God’s sending nature and the sent nature of his people are found in John:

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment (Jn 16:7-8) As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world (Jn 17:18) Again Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (Jn 20:21).

In these passages, four are mentioned—the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Church. Of these four, only the Father is not sent. This places him as the initiator in mission, with the rest of the godhead and the Church doing his will. Glasser therefore concludes “that the goal of *Missio Dei* is to incorporate people into the Kingdom of God and to involve them in his mission. Because the Father is the Sender, Jesus Christ the One

¹⁶ Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 33. For a survey of the history of use of the term *missio Dei*, see Flett, *The Witness of God*. Also see Bosch, “Hermeneutical Principles,” 389-93.

¹⁷ Guder, *Missional Church*, 4. For a work immediately prior to *Missional Church* which has a good discussion of “mission theology,” see Van Engen, *Mission on the Way*.

who is sent, and the Holy Spirit the Revealer, it follows that noninvolvement in mission on the part of the Church is to be deplored.”¹⁸ Guder writes, “The church does not do mission, it is mission. By its very calling and nature it exists as God’s ‘sent’ people.”¹⁹

Jesus’ Life and Ministry as the Model for the Church’s Mission

If the Church has clearly been sent, the question then becomes, What is the Church sent to do? Bosch states that “we cannot, with integrity, reflect on what mission might mean today unless we turn to the Jesus of the New Testament, since our mission is ‘moored’ to Jesus’ person and ministry.”²⁰ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, in their book, *ReJesus*, go further in emphasizing Christology in mission, stating that “Christology must determine missiology (our purpose and function in this world), which in turn must determine ecclesiology (the cultural forms and expressions of the church).”²¹ If this is

¹⁸ Glasser and Van Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 243.

¹⁹ Guder, “Missional Theology,” 5. The language of sending in the gospels is prominent in relation to the godhead. The Father will send the Spirit (Jn 14:24-26), as will the Son (Jn 16:7-8). The Father sends the Son, the Spirit sends Jesus (into the wilderness—Mk 1:12), and the Father and the Son send the Spirit. The most instances by far in this category is Jesus’ reflexive use of sending language, where he simply relates that he has been sent to whatever it is he is doing. For instance, the words that he speaks and the teaching that he offers are not his own; they come from the one who sent him (Jn 3:34; 7:16; 12:44-50). Jesus’ authority and will is not his own; he seeks to do the will of the Father and the Father testifies for him (Jn 4:30; 6:37-39; 8:16-18, 26-29). Those who accept Jesus accept the Father (Jn 13:15b-17). These passages and others like them all point towards Jesus as being God’s ambassador, fulfilling God’s mission. See Mt 10:40; Mk 9:37; Lk 9:47-48; Jn 3:34; 5:30; 5:33-38; 6:29; 6:37-39; 6:44; 7:18; 5:33-38; Jn 7:16; 7:28-29; 7:33; 8:16-18; 8:26-29; 8:42; 10:35-36; Jn 11:41; 12:44-50; 13:15b-17, 20; 15:21; 16:4-5; 17:8. See also Jesus’ parables about the sending on the “son” (Mt 21:37; Mk 12:6; Lk 20:13).

²⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 74.

²¹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009). While acknowledging that Frost and Hirsch display a “robust” missional understanding in *ReJesus*, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile criticize Frost and Hirsch for making Christology, rather than the Trinity, the starting point for mission. They assert that this formula reduces the role of the Spirit in the world, emphasizes the Church as a contrast community using Jesus as an example, and reduces missiology to an “applied discipline.” See Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 79. Frost and Hirsch are writing as practitioners and strategists, and since Jesus is the

true, then an examination of Jesus' life and ministry is warranted in determining the Church's mission and the forms, ministries, and practices (its ecclesiology) that constitute missional outreach.

In Matthew and Mark, Jesus begins his call, saying, "Come, follow me . . . and I will send you out to fish for people" (Mt 4:19; cf. Mk 1:17). In these gospels, the disciples' sending is from the beginning patterned after that of Jesus. John concludes his gospel with Jesus saying, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). From these passages, it is clear that the disciples' mission, and thus the Church's mission, is patterned after the mission of Christ. Therefore, a brief narrative of Jesus' life and ministry is appropriate in determining the Church's mission.

Jesus was sent by the Father and came humbly into the world, being born in a manger, the adopted son of Joseph the carpenter and his earthly mother, Mary. After fleeing for a time to Egypt to escape King Herod's wrath, he and his family returned to Judea and settled in Nazareth. Little is known of his childhood, except that one day when traveling with his family he was left behind in the temple. When his parents found him,

clearest example of a lived out life of mission, they emphasize Christology. Jürgen Moltmann lays down a somewhat similar formula as Frost and Hirsch, stating, "Mission comprehends the whole of the church, not only parts of it, let alone the members it has sent out. To proclaim the gospel of the dawning kingdom is the first and most important element in the mission of Jesus, the mission of the Spirit, and the mission of the church; but it is not the only one. Mission embraces all activities that serve to liberate man from his slavery in the presence of the coming God, slavery which extends from economic necessity to Godforsakenness." However, as the book title shows, Moltmann has a stronger emphasis upon the Spirit's role in mission. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). Certainly Frost and Hirsch could lay down a fuller understanding of the Spirit's role in mission; however, they do have significant writings on "whisperings of the soul," "Hebraic spirituality," and spiritual gifts. See Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21 Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 95-200. The full implications of the above formula for the Church's ecclesiology cannot be explored in this paper, and there may be limitations to its application if one places value in historic church practices; however, in regards to missional outreach, this is definitely the pattern followed in this paper.

he indicated that he had to be in his father's house. For thirty years, however, he lived and dwelled in quiet obscurity, which emphasizes his thorough incarnation.²²

At the age of thirty, he was baptized by John the Baptist, whereupon he received the Holy Spirit, empowering him for his ministry. The Spirit led him into the desert to be tempted; however, he resisted all temptation, relying upon the Spirit and the word of God. After successfully resisting temptation, he began to call his disciples, forming a missional community that would become fishers of people. The community he assembled was diverse, composed of people from all socio-economic levels, political persuasions, and gender. In his ministry he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God, taught in the synagogue, and healed people from every kind of sickness and disease. On the road he taught his disciples how to pray, how to live, how to think, and how to act. In short, he taught them how to live under the rule or reign of God, and he modeled this will for them.

An essential part of Jesus' ministry was sharing meals with those he encountered, and he included religious leaders, his own disciples, and social outcasts in his table fellowship. He consistently sought out those who were lost and hurting, while challenging those who claimed to be religious leaders to live a more authentic lifestyle. He continually taught against empty ritualism and the burdensome rules of people, and pointed towards the heart and love of God and neighbor. His challenging of religious norms and political powers led the religious leaders to seek his death. One of his disciples, Judas, betrayed him, and he was led away to face trial. At the trial before the religious leaders, he was condemned and sent to the Roman Governor Pilate. At the trial

²² Frost and Hirsch state, "It is sobering to think that for thirty years Jesus practiced this presence before he actually started his ministry. Nazareth had indeed become a living part of him and defined him in so many unaccountable ways." See Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 39.

before Pilate the religious leaders stirred up the crowd against him, and they shouted for his death. Pilate handed him over to be beaten. He was crucified. He was buried. And three days later, he was resurrected from the grave by the power of the Father and the Holy Spirit. He appeared to more than five hundred disciples after his resurrection, teaching them for forty days about the kingdom of God. He then ascended into heaven.

With this story in mind, Jesus' statements of why he was sent (missional language) or why he came can be examined. In Capernaum, as Jesus reads the great Isaiah scroll, he says that he was anointed to "proclaim good news to poor," and was sent "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19). Similarly, Jesus said that he was sent to "proclaim the good news of kingdom of God" (Lk 4:43). In John, Jesus says that he was sent to do God's work, which was the harvest of the lost (Jn 4:34-35; Jn 8:4-5). Jesus also says that he was sent to bring eternal life (Jn 5:22-24; 6:57; 17:3). As to the language of "coming," Jesus said that he came to fulfill the law and the prophets (Mt 5:17), call sinners (Mt 9:13; Mk 2:17; 5:32), bring a sword and fire (Mt 10:34-35; Lk 12:29), and serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28). He also came to preach (Mk 1:38), seek and save the lost (Lk 15:1-32; 19:10), be the bread of heaven (Jn 6:33; 6:50), do God's will (Jn 6:38), bring sight to the blind (Jn 9:39), bring life (Jn 10:10), be a light to the world (Jn 12:46), and save the world (Jn 12:47).

Characteristics of the Missional Church

By looking at the mission of Jesus, which is the mission of the Church, the various forms of the Great and Limited Commissions (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:8; Lk 24:44-

49; Lk 10:1-24; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8), and explicit statements about the fundamental nature of the Church from the rest of the New Testament (e.g., Mt 5:14-16; Mt 22:37-40; Eph 2:11; 4:11; 2 Cor 5:18-20; 1 Pt 2:9), a few characteristics can be given to describe the missional church as it goes into the world. The missional church: 1) loves God and neighbor; 2) views itself as a missional community; 3) actively seeks and saves the lost; 4) lives incarnationally amongst the people whom it seeks to save, and thus its mission is contextualized for its community; 5) follows the Spirit who has preceded her into the world without fear, trusting in the Spirit's convicting power, with each member utilizing his or her spiritual gifts to help him or her live and serve like Christ;²³ 6) engages in table fellowship, which includes non-believers, on a consistent basis; 7) is servant to the world, is salt and light to its community; 8) provides ministries of healing to the world, ministering to the brokenness of humanity; 9) proclaims the gospel of Jesus, the kingdom of God, and Christ's death, burial, and resurrection; 10) lives under the kingdom reign of God and witnesses to this reign through its lifestyle;²⁴ 11) ministers to the poor, needy, and outcasts of society; 12) is being made holy, transformed into image of God by the Spirit and shaped through the truth of Christ and Scripture; 13) emphasizes heart over ritual, continually seeking to shed itself of burdensome rules that are oppressive; 14)

²³ Newbigin states, "Mission is not just something the church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit In sober truth the Spirit is himself the witness who goes before the church in its missionary journey 'Don't imagine,' the missionary will be told, 'that you are going to take God into the factory. He is there already. He has been at work there long before you came on the scene and he will be there after you have gone. Your job is to learn what he is doing in the world which is already his, not to introduce him to a world from which he is absent.'" Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 56, 61.

²⁴ Newbigin states, "The only hermeneutic of the gospel . . . is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it." Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227. For a discussion of the kingdom of God, see George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 54-132.

challenges all structures and powers, both religious and political, which fall short of the kingdom of God; 15) brings glory to God through its worship, its being, and its service; 16) seeks to keep all believers committed to Jesus and his mission; 17) proclaims repentance and forgiveness of sins and is itself a repentant and forgiven community; 18) reaches out to all nations/ethnic groups; 19) is an agent of reconciliation, breaking down all barriers; and 20) forms disciples of Jesus Christ (as it goes out into the world), baptizing them and teaching to obey everything that Jesus commanded—in order to make Christ-followers into fishers of people.^{25 26}

A few things should be noted about the above characteristics of the missional church. First, while the emphasis in the list is upon outward, missional characteristics, there are some that could be classified as inward (such as being a community) or upward

²⁵ The Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20 must be interpreted missionally and in the context of Matthew. The call to make disciples must go back to Jesus' original call to the disciples—"follow me, and I will make you fishers of people" (Mt 3:19). "Teaching to obey" should not be viewed through modernistic lenses of mere classroom instruction, but as actively teaching disciples how to become fishers of people. Hirsch and Altclass say that "a missional understanding of this commission requires us to see Jesus's tactic as to mobilize a whole lot of little versions of himself infiltrating every nook and cranny of society . . . It is the essential task of discipleship to embody the mission and character of Jesus." See Alan Hirsch and Darryn Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 65. Flett states that "the lack of reference to mission at every level of the teaching ministry of the church is a frightful abrogation of theological responsibility." Flett, *The Witness of God*, 196-97.

²⁶ The above list of missional church characteristics is slightly more expansive than the list proposed by the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN), but includes all of their characteristics. Frost and Hirsch add to GOCN's list incarnational ministry, messianic spirituality, and apostolic leadership, which they set in opposition to attractional ministry, dualistic spirituality, and hierarchical leadership. See Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 11-12. The diversity of lists shows that these characteristics could be expanded or reduced, based upon need and how much of the story one desires to capture. In their review of the missional literature that has been written for North America since the publication of *Missional Church*, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile state that this literature can be summarized into four themes: 1) God is a missionary God who sends the church into the world; 2) God's mission in the world is related to the reign (kingdom) of God; 3) the missional church is an incarnational (versus an attractional) ministry sent to engage a postmodern, post-Christendom, globalized context; and 4) the internal life of the missional church focuses on every believer living as a disciple engaging in mission. Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 3. Obviously, these themes would all be found in the above list of missional church characteristics.

(worship); however, the essential sent nature of the Church must always be kept in mind, and these characteristics should not be looked at in isolation from the Church's mission. The Church displays these characteristics as it goes into the world. For instance, Hirsch proposes that mission, discipleship, and worship define the church. (Mission in this model would be defined as the outward focus directed to the world, and discipleship would be Christlikeness, which is the aim of "spiritual formation.")²⁷ Both discipleship and worship, however, contribute to mission and find their fullest expression in mission: "It is the essential task of discipleship to embody the mission and character of Jesus."²⁸ Discipleship must ne viewed missionally and go back to Jesus' original call to the disciples—"Come, follow me . . . and I will send you out to fish for people" (Mt 4:19). Furthermore, Hirsch upholds the primacy of mission for it is the means for discipleship: "This is exactly how Jesus does discipleship: he organizes it around mission. As soon as they are called he takes the disciples on an adventurous journey of mission, ministry, and learning. Straightaway they are involved in proclaiming the kingdom of God, serving the poor, healing, and casting out demons. It is active and direct disciple making in the context of mission."²⁹ In addition, in regards to worship, when one understands that mission is an essential aspect of who God is, then worship must necessarily be about praising God's historical and current redemptive acts in mission. This should also lead the Church into movement out into the world. Flett contends, "As the community of God's reconciliation, the Christian community is a declarative fellowship: she is such

²⁷ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002).

²⁸ Hirsch and Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook*, 65.

²⁹ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 119.

only as she moves toward those who would be God's enemies in the knowledge, love, and power of reconciliation's reality. This movement applies to the community life of worship, for as a missionary, God can only be worshiped in a missionary fashion."³⁰

What, then, is the role for formal worship? Here again a focus upon Jesus' life and his story is helpful. Jesus seemed to spend the majority of his time in evangelism and service, not in worship assemblies. This is not to denigrate formal worship, but to put it in its place. There is a much greater opportunity to bring glory to God through the church's daily service to the world if only in sheer time. It should also be noted that even in the new heaven and new earth, service continues. If mission is a fundamental part of God, then it will continue to be a part of his people.³¹

Second, while there is a definite interlinking between mission, worship, and discipleship, it is important to keep mission distinctly outward-focused and related to evangelism and service to the world. As Stephen Neil famously said, "If everything is mission, nothing is mission."³² In part, this is what the term "missional outreach" seeks to do. By adding outreach to the term missional, a clear distinction is drawn from other things that the Church may do—what some might call "purposes of the church."³³ (These

³⁰ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 294. The worship assembly should "end" with a "sending" of the church out into the world on mission. Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church*, Engaging Worship (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 53.

³¹ Note Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 7:15, 22:3. "As God is a missionary God, this life of fellowship cannot cease or alter with the *eschaton*. The active life of service in which God as ruler encounters the human is the nature of eternal life. Life in hope means dedication to the service of God." Flett, *The Witness of God*, 291-92.

³² Stephen Neill, quoted in Flett, *The Witness of God*, 7.

³³ Warren proposed traditional categories of evangelism, discipleship, service, fellowship, and worship as the purposes of the Church. See Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without*

other purposes still happen in the midst of the world, not isolated from the world.)

Second, reductionism always has the inherent danger of distorting the story. That is why the story must be told again and again, with Jesus as the main character and our model for mission. The Church gathers together to hear the story of Jesus, relishing each re-telling.

The question could now be asked, how does the missional church and its characteristics relate to the overall mission of God? A simple comparison shows that there is overlap between these two, but that the overall mission of God is broader in scope. Frost and Hirsch define a missional church in the following way: “A missional church is one whose primary commitment is to the missionary calling of the people of God. As such, it is one that aligns itself with God’s missionary purposes in the world The missional church is a sent church with one of its defining values being the development of a church life and practice that is contextualized to that culture to which it believes it is sent.”³⁴ The church partners with God in bringing redemption to creation, redemption to humanity, and his kingdom reign, but ultimately it is God who makes these things happen. Furthermore, there are certain things which he alone can do. The mission is God’s, and the Church follows in his path, seeking to partner with him.

Compromising Your Message & Mission (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 119. This type of categorization, however, is incomplete, for it fails to capture the essential missional nature of the Church.

³⁴ Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 229. In *The Forgotten Ways*, Hirsch says that the missional church “is a community of God’s people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, the real purpose of being an agent of God’s mission to the world. In other words, the church’s true and authentic organizing principle is mission.” Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 82. Some missional authors, however, resist defining missional. See Alan J. Roxburgh, M. Scott Boren, and Mark Priddy, *Introducing the Missional Church What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One*, Allelon Missional Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 27-45.

CHAPTER 4

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR EVANGELISM AND MISSIONAL OUTREACH

The missional church follows the life and mission of Jesus, and as it does this it will display the characteristics that were listed in Chapter 3. All that the Church does God can use towards his overall, redemptive mission for the world. In fact, God can use even the failure of a church to live for God in his redemptive purposes, as he did with Israel in the exile; however, “if everything is mission, nothing is mission.”¹ There must be an intentionality of mission behind all that the church does, for it is the specifically outward movement to the world that is the essence of mission. This mission, or “missional outreach,” is most especially tied to evangelism; it is evangelism, properly defined, with a missional thrust. This chapter gives a historical survey and etymology of evangelism, examines the role of the Father, Son, and Spirit and early New Testament evangelists in evangelism, defines evangelism, considers how a missional understanding of the Church impacts evangelism, and gives a definition of missional outreach.

¹ Stephen Neill, quoted in Flett, *The Witness of God*, 7.

A Brief, Historical Survey of Evangelism

In the pre-Constantine era (the first through fourth centuries, evangelism was different from how it is today. Christians at this time did not have to deal with all of the baggage of post-Christendom, high-profile scandals of well known Christians and televangelists, or secular atheism; however, the challenges that they faced in spreading the gospel were enormous. At the same time, there were many factors that contributed to the rapid growth of Christianity—not the least, of course, was God’s blessing and guiding of this growth.

The Church had to overcome many obstacles to growth in its first few centuries. Many Jews found the idea of a crucified Messiah, who had been cursed by God by hanging on a tree, unthinkable, and Jesus challenged their understandings of monotheism. For Greeks and Romans, a crucified criminal as a god was equally ridiculous. The exclusive claims of Christianity made little sense in the pluralistic, polytheistic, Greco-Roman culture of that time, leading in fact to charges of atheism. Christianity demanded a strict moral ethic—something that was unheard of at that time, as ethics was divorced from religion and left in the hands of philosophers. In addition, for much of this time period, Christianity was illegal, and Christians at times faced great persecution.²

There were also many positive factors which contributed to the evangelistic success of the early Church. The *pax Romana* (Roman peace), Roman roads that traversed the Empire, and the common Greco-Roman language all allowed for easy spread of the gospel. The *Diaspora* created missionary “beach heads” of Jewish

² Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 50-75. See also John Mark Terry, Ebbie C. Smith, and Justice Anderson, *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998).

communities for the early apostles and missionaries to begin their evangelistic outreach. A move towards monotheism had begun with philosophers such as Plato, and the early Christians' purity and passionate witness had a counter-cultural appeal.³ Certainly, the gospel was spread through the apostles and their successors, which included traveling missionaries/evangelists (recorded in the *Didache*), and (missionary) bishops.⁴ Probably the greatest factor, however, was the passion and witness of Christianity's adherents, including the profound witness of the martyrs. Michael Green, author of *Evangelism in the Early Church*, notes that "the very fact that we are so imperfectly aware of how evangelism was carried out and by whom should make us sensitive to the possibility that the little man, the unknown ordinary man, the man who left no literary remains, was the primary agent in mission."⁵

The conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine and his "Edict of Milan" in 311 CE, which legalized Christianity, brought massive numbers into the Church. Indeed, the Church grew dramatically from 312 to 500 CE;⁶ however, this legalization of Christianity changed the "quality" of evangelism in many of the converts in much of the Roman Empire.⁷ Prior to legalization, Church leaders sought to ensure that initiates understood the basic truths and practices of the Christian faith. The Church, however,

³ Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 29-49. Terry, Smith, and Anderson, *Missiology*, 166-74.

⁴ Terry, Smith, and Anderson, *Missiology*, 166-74.

⁵ Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 242.

⁶ Terry, Smith, and Anderson, *Missiology*, 175-80.

⁷ Evangelism in the early Church had been integrated very closely with "discipleship" (further growth in the Christian faith) and spiritual formation (the shaping of the heart/mind/will to reflect Christ's heart/mind/will). With the legalization of Christianity by Constantine, "it would now take more courage to refuse Christianity than to embrace it." Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), 119.

soon became overwhelmed with the massive hordes of pagans who were brought into the Church after legalization, resulting in an increase in nominalism amongst the new “converts.” Still, as pagans came into the Empire, many were open to the gospel and were converted, and by 500 CE, most inhabitants of the Roman Empire considered themselves “Christian.” During this time, missionary bishops, the monastic orders, and ordinary Christians continued to spread the message of Christ, a message that was accompanied by tremendous acts of benevolence and social service, including care for the poor, the dead, widows and orphans, abandoned children, the hungry, the sick during epidemics, and strangers and aliens.⁸

While a pure form of evangelism would continue amongst certain people groups and areas—such as the heathen tribes of Northern Europe, Germany, and Great Britain (through Celtic missionaries and Benedictines from Rome)—the medieval period resulted in an overall loss of emphasis upon evangelism in the Western Church.⁹ What evangelism did occur happened through the monastic orders or through kings by force.¹⁰ During this time, the Church institutionalized and aligned itself with the state, creating “Christendom.” As Christendom took hold across Europe, people were baptized as infants and viewed to have the faith of their rulers.

⁸ Terry, Smith, and Anderson, *Missiology*, 181. “In the early church, there was no dichotomy between social service and evangelism. Both were natural activities integral to the church’s mission.” See also Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans., James Moffatt, Second, Enlarged and Rev. ed., vol. 1 (New York: Williams and Norgate, 1908). Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 73-128.

⁹ Terry, Smith, and Anderson, *Missiology*, 183-94. The Church also lost tremendous ground in northern Africa and Arabia in this time due to the gains of Islam.

¹⁰ John Mark Terry, *Evangelism: A Concise History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 45-55.

The Reformation, while a great time for Church renewal, had virtually no emphasis upon evangelism. William Abraham states, “The Reformers had next to no interest in evangelism. Either they believed that this work was purely the responsibility of the first apostles, or they held that it had already been accomplished.”¹¹ Other reasons for the Reformers lack of interest in evangelism include their daily struggle to survive, isolation from people of other religions, and belief that they were in the end times.¹²

Beginning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, evangelism began to be “revived.” Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, and John and Charles Wesley helped bring about the “Great Awakening” (1720-1744) in the United States, and evangelism came to be equated with revivalist preaching.¹³ In 1792, William Carey, the “father of modern missions,” began to criticize the “common Protestant belief that the Great Commission had been fulfilled,” and he formed the Baptist Missionary Society to resume evangelism to unreached people groups. This marked the rise of the modern missions movement. Closely following this was the Second Great Awakening (1800-1830), which was fueled by the preaching of Charles Finney and Dwight Moody.¹⁴

¹¹ William J. Abraham, "A Theology of Evangelism: The Heart of the Matter," *Interpretation* 48, no. 2 (1994): 121-122.

¹² Terry, Smith, and Anderson, *Missiology*, 194-96.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 200-202.

¹⁴ The Roman Catholics and Pietists were actually the ones “who first came to see that confining the work of evangelism to antiquity was both unbiblical and unrealistic.” Abraham, "A Theology of Evangelism," 121. Though criticized for their emphasis upon emotion and individual salvation, these revivals were actually hugely successful in getting people to become a part of a local church. See Paul G. Sonnack, "A Perspective on Evangelism and American Revivalism," *Word & World* 1, no. 1 (1981): 55. These revivalistic calls appealed to the emotion, were anti-intellectual, and were highly individualistic. Terry, *Evangelism*, 127-57. Consider that, in 1790, less than 10 percent of the United States population belonged to a church. By 1860, this number had increased to 30 percent of the population. See Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005*. Finney is estimated to have had 500,000 make professions of faith during his ministry, and Moody as many as 100,000. See Terry, *Evangelism*, 146, 155.

In the twentieth century, the mass evangelistic efforts of Moody would continue with Billy Sunday and Billy Graham, and mass media would be amplified through the rise of television and televangelists. The latter half of the century saw the rise of parachurch evangelistic ministries, such as Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade for Christ, and Youth for Christ. Evangelism was reduced to making a decision to believe in Jesus so a person could be forgiven and go to heaven, as exemplified in James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion*.¹⁵ A shift began in the 1980s away from these impersonal methods with "lifestyle evangelism" due to a recognition that the trustworthiness of the messenger, as well as the message, was important in evangelism.¹⁶ Now with the fall of Christendom in the West in the latter half of the twentieth century and the first part of the twenty-first century and with the rise of postmodernism, the great need for evangelism—and a different kind of evangelism—is apparent.

Etymology of Evangelism

Definitions of evangelism abound, perhaps in part because the specific word "evangelism" is not used in the Bible. This does not mean that the concept is not present, of course, but simply that this specific word is not used. The term "evangelist" is found in Acts 21:8 in reference to Philip, who was one of the Seven; in Ephesians 4:11, in a list of

¹⁵ D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970). Guder argues that this reductionism in Western Christianity has a long history, going back even prior to Constantine, but especially solidified with the rise of Christendom. "Salvation became more and more focused upon the individual, and the cosmic thrust of the gospel shifted into a concern for the person's life after death." Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 105. For a discussion of reductionism, see Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 97-141.

¹⁶ Terry, *Evangelism*, 174-97.

apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers; and in 2 Timothy 4:5, in which Timothy is told to do the work of an evangelist.

The etymology of the word evangelist shows that this word came from the εὐαγγέλιον, or “the good news.” Based upon etymology, an evangelist (εὐαγγελιστής) is “a proclaimer of good news.” The word εὐαγγέλιον is found in twenty-seven verses in the New Testament, with several additional references to “proclaiming the good news” (Mk 1:14; Lk 8:1; Acts 5:42) and “preach the good news” (Mt 4:23; 9:35; Lk 3:18; 4:43, Acts 8:12; 14:7; 14:21; 17:18). This proclamation was primarily to nonbelievers. This is not to say that the good news should not be preached to believers--it is a matter of first importance (1 Cor 15), and believers need to be reminded of the truths of the gospel; however, when we point towards passages on “proclaiming the good news,” we are pointing towards settings out in the world. From these passages it can be seen that the gospel is fundamentally about Jesus, the kingdom of God, and the salvation that is found through Christ (Mk 1:1; 1:15; 1 Cor 15:1-6; Acts 10:34-43; Rm 1:1-5).

The Father’s, Son’s, and the Spirit’s Role in Evangelism

If evangelism is, at least in part, the telling of good news, then evangelism must begin with the Father. The creation account is an account of good news, beginning with God’s declaration, “Let there be light,” his assessment that all that he was created was “good,” and his assessment that humanity was “very good.” When sin entered into the world, God declared the good news that one day a descendant of Eve would destroy Satan—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Father’s declaration of good news is of peace, salvation, and the reign of God (Is 52:7), and of the suffering servant who would be

appointed by God to tell the good news (Is 61:1). God not only announced the good news, but he also made it possible by giving his Son to die for the world out of love (Jn 3:16f). Thus, the Father is the initiator in evangelism, just as he is with mission.

Jesus relates to evangelism in three primary ways. First, Jesus is, of course, the embodiment of the good news. In secular Greek usage in the first century, the word for “good news” (*euangélion*) was applied to the cult of the Roman emperor. In this myth, the Roman emperor was viewed to be “Savior of the world,” a god in human form, and ruler over humanity, animals, even the winds and the sea. The proclamation of his birth and ascension to the throne was to bring about peace in the world, and these events were viewed to be “good news.”¹⁷ Clearly, the gospel writers brought out all of these themes that had been applied to the Roman emperor and instead applied them to Jesus, the true Savior of the world, God-man, peace-bringer, and ruler over all creation. This is why his birth is announced as “good news” by the angels (Lk 2:10). So evangelism today ought to proclaim the good news about Jesus himself.

Second, not only is Jesus the embodiment of good news, but he himself is an evangelist. In Nazareth, Jesus applies Isaiah 61:1-2 to himself, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:18).¹⁸ While this passage could be interpreted in various ways, it would seem that Jesus’ proclamation here

¹⁷ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

¹⁸ Bosch says that “Luke 4:16-21 has, for all practical purposes, replaced Matthew’s ‘Great Commission’ as the key text not only for understanding Christ’s own mission but also that of the church.” Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 84.

included a message of freedom and release from spiritual, emotional, and physical bondage, and a message of grace. This message was directed towards the “poor,” and it was preached with the empowerment of the Spirit. This interpretation is confirmed by Jesus’ immediate actions after this reading, as Jesus taught with authority, cast out demons, and healed Simon’s mother-in-law. It soon becomes evident that Jesus’ message is empowered by the Spirit and almost always accompanied by these healings acts of service. In fact, when John the Baptist raises the question as to whether or not Jesus was the promised Messiah, Jesus points toward his healing ministries as evidence of his Messianic nature (Lk 7:21-23). Evangelism today should follow Jesus’ model of proclaiming the message along with healing acts of service, empowered by the Spirit.

Third, as an evangelist, Jesus’ primary message was the good news of the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of (the) heaven(s) (Mk 1:38; Lk 4:43, 8:1, 9:1).¹⁹ The kingdom of God is a complex concept that can be understood as God’s rule or reign over his people and all of creation. While God has always been ruling, through Jesus’ life, ministry, and message, and the coming of the Spirit, the kingdom of God broke into history in a dramatic way.²⁰ Jesus’ description of the kingdom having “come near” points towards God’s reign as being an accessible reality—“a new world, a new state of affairs, a new community”—which people can enter into through belief and repentance (Mk 1:15) and baptism (Jn 3:5), resulting in “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”

¹⁹ William J. Larkin and Joel F. Williams, eds., *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach*, American Society of Missiology Series No. 27 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 39. The phrase the “kingdom of the heaven(s)” is used only by Matthew. This phrase is a Semitic idiom, and “heavens” is a substitute for the name of God. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 61.

²⁰ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 65. “Jesus’ message is that in his own person and mission God has invaded human history and has triumphed over evil, even though the final deliverance will occur only at the end of the age.”

(Rm 14:17).²¹ Jesus' healings and his casting out of demons were evidence of the peace and restoration that God offered in his kingdom (Mt 12:28), and his inclusion of the poor (Lk 4:18, 6:20) and criticism of the rich (Lk 18:24) showed that justice was an essential part of his kingdom.²² This kingdom is to be proclaimed, and it mysteriously produces fruit (Mt 4:26-34). This kingdom can be experienced now, and it is a foretaste of the final consummation of the kingdom which will occur at the Messianic banquet at Christ's return in the new heaven and new earth (Lk 13:29).²³

The Spirit plays a tremendous role in evangelism, including his working through the Son. Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:18), and he received the Spirit at his baptism (Lk 3:22). Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to face temptation (Lk 4:1), after which he returned to Galilee full of the Spirit (Lk 4:14) and began preaching with the Spirit (Lk 44:18; Mt 12:18). Jesus was given "the Spirit without limit" to help him in his verbal witness (Jn 3:34), to give him the power to heal and cast out demons (Mt 12:28) and to give him joy (Lk 10:21). After his resurrection, John records that the Father and Son would send the Spirit to teach and remind the disciples of what Jesus had taught them (Jn 14:25-26; 15:26) and to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn 16:7-13). Jesus then breathed on the disciples to cause them to receive the Spirit (Jn 20:22), an act which foreshadowed Pentecost.

The outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 1-2) was a seminal act which lays out the primacy of the Spirit's role in evangelism after Christ's resurrection. If the

²¹ Glasser and Van Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 189.

²² Ibid., 216.

²³ This is the "now" but "not yet," dual aspect of the kingdom of God. See Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 54-67.

gospels are the primary records of Jesus' actions in evangelism, then the Book of Acts is the primary record of the Spirit's actions in evangelism. There is, however, great continuity in Jesus' role and the Spirit's role in evangelism.²⁴ The Spirit gives the disciples power to be Christ's witnesses (Acts 1:8), to speak in tongues and prophesy (Acts 2:1-18), to do miracles (Acts 4:1f, 5:15-16; Jn 14:12-14), and to speak boldly and with wisdom (Acts 4:31; 6:10). The Spirit is the strategist in the Book of Acts, and he often acts in surprising ways—sending out missionaries to people that had been written off, and opening and closing mission routes (Acts 8:39; 10:19f; 11:12; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6-8; 20:22). This points to a fundamental truth of missional theology—that the Spirit of God has been sent out ahead of his people, and the church's role is to seek to follow the Spirit and discern where God is already at work,

Other New Testament Evangelists

If evangelism were based only upon etymology, evangelism might be equated with mere proclamation, and not something that includes conversion or “service” (non-verbal) evangelism; however, Abraham says that in looking at evangelism, it is important to note “what evangelism has actually meant in the early Church and in history, not judged by the etymology of the word *evangelism* and its rather occasional use in Scripture, but by what evangelists have actually done in both proclaiming the gospel and establishing new converts in the kingdom of God.”²⁵ In other words, the actual practice of

²⁴ Eddie Gibbs states that Luke “makes it clear that his gospel recorded that which Jesus *began* to do and to teach until his ascension into heaven. The Acts of the Apostles recorded the continuing work of the ascended Lord through his church on earth, which is now inspired and guided by the Spirit.” Eddie Gibbs, “Chapter 9,” in Larkin and Williams, *Mission in the New Testament*, 19.

²⁵ William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 69.

“evangelism” has included proclamation, doing of good deeds, call to conversion, and initiation into the Christian community.²⁶ This was what Philip and other “evangelists” in the early church did.

Evangelism as Proclamation, Accompanied by Good Deeds, with Conversion

Based upon the study above, this paper will define evangelism in the following way: evangelism is the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ (his birth, person, life, death, burial and resurrection) and the kingdom of God (God’s rule or reign in the world and over his people) by the Church and individuals through the power of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by good deeds and ministries of healing, with a call towards conversion to the lordship of Jesus Christ and initiation into the Christian community through faith, repentance, and baptism.²⁷ God is the initiator in evangelism, the Son is the model for and focus of evangelism, and the Spirit is the one who convicts humanity in evangelism. This involvement of all three persons in the godhead and the Church in evangelism shows its fundamental importance to God and the Church’s mission.²⁸

²⁶ “One of the greatest weaknesses of revivalism is the lack of a strong and dynamic ecclesiology, which is evident in language and practice.” Gordon T. Smith, *Transforming Conversion: Rethinking the Language and Contours of Christian Initiation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 15.

²⁷ For the nature of the evangelists’ message, see Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 56-92. See also Michael Green, *Thirty Years That Changed the World: The Book of Acts for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 73-96. For works that link evangelism to the reign of God, see the following: Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984); Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*; and Glasser and Van Engen, *Announcing the Kingdom*. For a historical look at initiation into the Christian community and its link with evangelism, see Robert E. Webber, *Journey to Jesus: The Worship, Evangelism, and Nurture Mission of the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

²⁸ Scott Jones says, “The church’s mission is wider than evangelism and includes all that God expects the church to do. At the same time, evangelism is an essential part of mission; when there is no evangelistic component the missionary activity is inadequate.” Scott J. Jones, “The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness & Discipleship” (2003): 101.

By emphasizing both a Trinitarian approach to evangelism and the church's role in evangelism, the goal has been to distance this definition of evangelism from the humanistic, individualistic methodologies of so much of American evangelism.²⁹ While some are specially called to be evangelists and all Christians are called to be witnesses, evangelism must be connected to God and to the entire Christian community.³⁰ God has created a new people to be part of, and this is an essential aspect of the good news.

Sending as a Part of Evangelism

If the missional understanding of the church is forgotten, then the above definition of evangelism could conceivably occur without a person or church ever leaving their locale. In other words, without a missional understanding, evangelism could be performed purely within an "attractional," "come to us," type of approach. Of course, attractional evangelism has been the recent history for much evangelism, and this has been successful in reaching some types of people. The Church also should not shy away from the idea of being "attractive," and, indeed, a church that is missional will likely be attractive to many (and repelling to others). Jesus certainly was attractive to many.³¹

²⁹ For a discussion of humanistic and individualistic tendencies in North American evangelism, see David Lowes Watson, "Christ All in All: The Recovery of the Gospel for North American Evangelism," *Missiology* 19, no. 4 (1991): 443-59.

³⁰ Peter Wagner speaks of the difference between the gift of evangelism, which is given to some, and the role of evangelism, which is the duty and privilege of all Christians. C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1994), 166-78. Michael Green states that the very fact that so little is known about the "evangelists" in the first few centuries of the church during which the church was growing dramatically points to the possibility that it was ordinary Christians who did most of the evangelizing. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 208.

³¹ For a positive discussion of the blending of certain types of attractional and missional type of outreach, see Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, Exponential Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

The concept of being sent into the world, however, points at the least towards an emphasis upon doing evangelism with a “go to them” rather than a “come to us” mentality and methodology. Thus, all that the Church does, including evangelism, ought to be done—at least conceptually if not in every case physically—in the midst of the people whom they are trying to reach. Additionally, as a methodology, the attractional approach will become less and less effective as Christendom continues to decline. Furthermore, it is questionable whether true discipleship can be realized without Christ-followers being sent out on mission as Jesus sent his disciples out into the world.³²

Missional Outreach Definition and Strategy

If evangelism and the missional concept with its emphasis upon being sent are combined, then this could easily form the term “missional evangelism”; however, evangelism has, unfortunately, come to be viewed negatively by some due to abuses of the past. This negative view of evangelism is held by many that rightly emphasize incarnational living.³³ Furthermore, evangelism has often been defined in purely verbal terms, whereas “outreach” implies evangelism in both word and deed. Thus, in combining evangelism and missional, this paper will use the term “missional outreach.”

Missional outreach is evangelism with a missional—“go to them”—thrust, using the overall life and mission of Jesus as its model. As is stated above, the narrative of Jesus’ life must always be constantly re-examined in order to faithfully follow this

³² See Alan Hirsch and Debra Hirsch, *Untamed: Reactivating a Missional Form of Discipleship*, Shapevine (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010).

³³ Kevin Harney, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People: Sharing the Good News Naturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 15-16. Harney explicitly states that he used “outreach” in his book title rather than “evangelism” to avoid the negative connotations of evangelism.

mission. At the risk of reductionism, however, missional outreach does concentrate upon three of Jesus' own statements of why he came to earth: to seek and save the lost (Lk 19:10), to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45), and to proclaim the kingdom of God (Mk 1:15; 38; Jn 3:34). At High Pointe this has been simplified and put into a more memorable mission statement of seeking the lost, serving the community, and sharing the good news. This not only is a good shorthand summary of the church's mission, but it also forms a strategy. In order to reach the lost, High Pointe must seek them out (not wait for them to "come to church") and be in proximity to them. Those whom church members encounter must be served out of love and compassion, healing or "saving" them from the physical, emotional, and spiritual brokenness of their lives. Finally, because High Pointe serves people, members have the opportunity to share with these people the good news of Jesus, the kingdom of God, and the salvation that he brings. Seeking the lost, serving the community, and sharing the good news—this is the missional outreach strategy of the High Pointe Church of Christ in McKinney, Texas.³⁴

³⁴ While this strategy can be applied towards overseas missions as well, this paper will concentrate upon the application of this strategy in the local context of the High Pointe Church of Christ. While the missional concept should not be limited to the local context, missional authors and practitioners do emphasize the local context. For instance, Ed Stetzer contrasts overseas missions with being missional, saying, "Missional means actually doing mission right where you are . . . Think of it this way: missional means being a missionary without ever leaving your zip code." See Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2006).

PART THREE

STRATEGY

CHAPTER 5

A MISSIONAL OUTREACH STRATEGY FOR SEEKING THE LOST

Jesus said, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10). Hirsch and Darryn Altclass write, “Jesus is our primary model of mission. He *is* the Seeker and Savior of the lost.”¹ Jesus’ life shows that this seeking involves at the least actively going where people are—that is, being in close enough proximity to them to serve and share the good news with them. Missiologist Eckhard J. Schnabel says, “Jesus had worked as prophetic preacher and teacher, but contrary to the rabbinic model, he did not wait for

¹ Hirsch and Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook*, 45. In this missional outreach strategy, “seek and save the lost” is reduced down to seeking the lost and combined with “serving the community” and sharing the good news. I have done this for two reasons. First, this creates a more parallel “missional statement” type of formulation (seeking, serving, sharing). Second, salvation is included in the serving and sharing parts of the missional outreach strategy, and indeed forms a more holistic view of salvation. The word translated “save” in Luke 19:10 is σῶζω, which can refer to two primary forms of salvation. First, σῶζω can refer to salvation from physical or “natural dangers and afflictions,” and can be translated in various contexts as “save from death,” “bring out safely,” “save/free from disease,” “keep/preserve,” “thrive, prosper, get on well.” Second, σῶζω can refer to salvation from “transcendent danger or destruction” such as eternal death, or that which might lead to eternal death—sin or judgment. Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Jesus’ life and ministry showed that he brought both kinds of salvation to people. He fed the hungry, healed diseases, and cast out demons, and σῶζω in these contexts is usually translated as a form of “heal.” The eternal form of salvation is the form of salvation that is usually evoked in one’s mind when the term “save” is used, and indeed, Christ came to earth to save us from eternal death. In general, the “serving the community” aspect of the missional outreach strategy provides the physical healing of σῶζω by ministering to people in their areas of brokenness, and the “sharing the good news” provides the eternal healing of σῶζω by leading them into a saved relationship with Jesus Christ through conversion. In the context of this passage, Zacchaeus needed both forms of salvation. His greed placed him in a life of bondage and alienation from his kinsmen, and had he continued down this path without repentance, his eternal salvation would have been at stake as well. Jesus saved him from both dangers; however, he not only saved him from something, he saved him for something—a life of ministry, good works, and mission—as evidenced by his joyful party where he gives back fourfold to those whom he had wronged. Salvation is a past, present, and future reality.

people to come to him (although that happened as well); instead, he traveled through the towns, villages, and hamlets of Galilee (Mk 6:56), encountering people where they lived and worked.” This is illustrated perfectly in Jesus’ calling of the disciples, where he went to their places of work (James, John, Peter, and Andrew at their boats and Matthew at his tax booth) and invited them to become fishers of people.

The parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost (prodigal) son show that seeking the lost involves going where people are (shepherd leaves the sheep to go after the lost sheep, Jesus goes to Zacchaeus’s house), an intense and active search for the lost right in one’s midst (woman sweeps for the lost coin), and an intense and hopeful looking for the lost to return (father looks for the prodigal and runs to him when he appears).

Thus, seeking centers upon people intentionally looking for and connecting with people—which is the essence of social networking. *Wikipedia*, the online encyclopedia that is made possible by a social network, says that “a social network is a social structure made up of individuals (or organizations) called ‘nodes’, which are tied (connected) by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, common interest, financial exchange, dislike, sexual relationships, or relationships of beliefs, knowledge or prestige.”² These ties between individuals are

² "Social Network," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network (accessed February 10, 2011). A study by *Nature* magazine shows that articles in Wikipedia are almost as accurate as those in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, with a far greater number of articles at virtually no cost. See Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*, Digital Formations (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 130.

important, for the first practice of “missional linking” is “intentionally seeking to be in relation with the ‘other.’”³

While in recent decades, the printing press, radio, and television and other forms of mass media have allowed the good news to be proclaimed outside of these social circles through broadcast mediums, this has been a historical aberration. Throughout the course of the Church’s history, the gospel of Jesus Christ has spread through social networking circles.⁴ Additionally, despite all of the broadcast mediums available today, surveys indicate that most people still come to faith in Christ because of a friend or relative.⁵ This chapter will attempt to demonstrate how social networking was used by Jesus and the early Church in the spread of the gospel, as well as present current “real world” and online social networking strategies for missional outreach.

Social Networking by Jesus and the Early Church

Jesus was certainly shaped by his social connections, and his ministry was launched through these connections. On a divine level, he was sent by the Father to the earth, and he was conceived through the Holy Spirit. The Father was well pleased at his baptism, and the Spirit descended upon him at this time (Mt 3:13-17). On a human level, Jesus was raised by parents that sought to be obedient to God (Lk 1:21-40), and he

³ Dwight J. Friesen, *Thy Kingdom Connected: What the Church Can Learn from Facebook, the Internet, and Other Networks*, Emergent Village Resources for Communities of Faith (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 137.

⁴ This is a phenomenon that is not unique to Christianity. Rodney Stark, drawing a conclusion from his research on the subject, explains, “The basis for successful conversionist movements is growth through social networks, through a structure of direct and intimate interpersonal attachments.” The key to these movements continued growth is staying open as movements. See Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 20.

⁵ Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 73. Rainer’s study, like others, shows that 75 to 90 percent of people come to faith because of a friend or relative.

followed the ministry of his relative, John the Baptist, preaching this same message:

“Repent for the Kingdom of God is near” (Mt 3:2; 4:17).⁶ While his mother, brothers, and sisters were at times skeptical of his messianic claims, after his death and resurrection his mother Mary and his brothers were present at Pentecost, and his brother James became a foundational figure in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14; 15:13; 21:17).

The synoptic gospels seem to portray Jesus calling the disciples out of nowhere and without any prior connections; however, the gospel of John makes it clear that Jesus used social networking as he made this call, beginning with Andrew, one of John the Baptist’s followers, and then spreading through Andrew’s family and friends (Jn 1:40-42).⁷ Jesus of course also worked through other social structures of his day to spread the gospel, including the rabbinical schools, the synagogues, and agrarian society. Galilee, where Jesus grew up, also would have provided Jesus with various points of connection, serving as a physical hub connecting him to all sorts of people, including fishermen, farmers, tradesmen, artisans, tax collectors, and others.⁸

The early Christians followed Christ, sought to be like him, and took up his call to be fishers of people seriously. Moreover, missiologist Eckhard J. Schnabel asserts that

⁶ Jesus’ connection to John the Baptist undoubtedly helped him tremendously in launching his ministry, a concept that is both testified to in the gospels (John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus) and by social construction theory. The authors of *Palestine in the Time of Jesus* state that kinship was the primary social domain of ancient Mediterranean societies, followed by political structures and associations. K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 20.

⁷ “Instead of immediately leaving one’s everyday work place and following without hesitation, [in John] there is networking with kin and friends in the villages.” See Dennis C. Duling, “The Jesus Movement and Social Network Analysis: (Part II. The Social Network).” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* (2000). <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-94331533.html> (accessed May 14, 2009).

⁸ See Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 99-129. See also Dennis C. Duling, “The Jesus Movement and Social Network Analysis (Part I: The Spatial Network),” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* (1999), <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-94332368.html> (accessed May 21, 2009).

the early Christians followed Christ's life and mission even on the strategy level, for "they confessed Jesus not only as Messiah but also as Kyrios: his behavior was the model and the standard for their own behavior."⁹ An examination of the early Church's outreach strategy shows that the Church followed Jesus' model of social networking.

On Pentecost, the number of Jesus' followers who were gathered together was a mere 120 people. Yet, as the Spirit of God was poured out and Peter preached the gospel message, more than 3000 responded (Acts 2:1-41). While the apostles and other evangelists would play a key role in the spread of the gospel, increasingly the gospel would be spread by these ordinary Christians through their own social circles. The structure of the book of Acts is made up of radiating people-group circles, with the command to take the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). This rate of the transmission of the gospel through social networks would increase as persecution broke out against the Church and "all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). As has long been noted, the physical and social structures of the world of the early Church made networking possible on a grander scale. The Roman roads connected cities around the Empire, and those at Pentecost and those scattered by persecution were able to quickly take the gospel to their old or newly developed social networks. The common Greek language provided not only understandability, but a common way of thinking and a reference point for those sharing the gospel. The Diaspora assisted in the message transmission, with the synagogues serving as nodes or distribution hubs, connecting missionaries like Paul to family,

⁹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1544.

friends, and a vast network of people who already believed in God and were looking for a Messiah. Furthermore, as Paul goes through the household codes in his letters to Christians and draws out the implications for the gospel, he repeatedly encourages his readers to reach out to outsiders, make the most of every conversation, and impact every social stratum which they occupy for Christ (Col 3:18-4:6).¹⁰

As noted above, while the gospel message spread through apostles, evangelists, and missionary bishops, it spread primarily through ordinary Christians. Unlike the public evangelism of the “full time” evangelists, this “ordinary evangelism” would have worked primarily through social circles. This is the very type of evangelism on display in Origen’s response to Celsus, who charged that Christians spread their beliefs through wool, leather, and laundry workers, women, and children.¹¹

In its beginnings, it appears that Christianity was largely a movement amongst the lower class, Jews, women, and agrarian society in Palestine, but it soon became a movement that encompassed Gentiles, men and women, the educated, and urbanites across the Roman Empire.¹² While there were many sociological, religious, and political reasons for this, social networking played a major role in the numerical growth and demographic shift of Christians in the first three centuries. After Constantine, the era of

¹⁰ For a summary of the conditions that favored the spread of Christianity, including the Roman roads and common language, see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 579-80. In regards to the Diaspora, Stark writes, “In all the major centers of the empire were substantial settlements of Diasporan Jews *who were accustomed to receiving teachers from Jerusalem*. Moreover, the missionaries were likely to have family and friendship connections within at least some of the Diasporan communities. Indeed, if Paul is a typical example, the missionaries were themselves Hellenized Jews.” See Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 62.

¹¹ Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 208-09.

¹² Stark’s entire work, *The Rise of Christianity*, lays out these reasons and others for Christianity’s growth in the early centuries.

Christendom was ushered in, and Christianity soon became something that a person was born into in the Roman Empire. Now, with the crumbling of Christendom in the West, evangelism as it was practiced pre-Christendom must be rediscovered.¹³

“Real World” Social Networking and Strategies

If the gospel spreads along social lines, and Christians seek the lost through social networking, then finding ways to connect socially with non-Christians in the “real world” (as opposed to the online world, covered below) is essential in any missional outreach strategy. The challenge, of course, in suburban America, is that suburbanites are socially isolated. This is one of the areas of brokenness of suburbia highlighted above. Furthermore, Christians have found their social network in the Church, which consumes much of their social calendar and leaves little time for non-Christians. Therefore, social networking to find non-Christians is a challenge for Christians. The subjects below attempt to present ways for Christians to network socially with non-Christians in order to have opportunities to serve them and share the gospel.

¹³ Robert Webber, author of *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, says that “today’s church must be a hospitable community of people who reach out through social networking.” Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Formed Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 57. It should be noted that this paper’s perspective reflects my Western, post-Christendom context in North America. For a seminal work on post-Christendom, see Murray, *Post-Christendom*. Christendom is, of course, coming now for the first time to non-Western parts of the world. See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Rev. and exp. ed., *The Future of Christianity Trilogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Hirsch states that the gospel spreads like a virus, being “sneezed” and passed from one person to another. The conditions under which this virus will thrive “arise from a complex interrelationship between our communication with culturally resonant ideas through meaningful relationships, using new media, understanding human need for the gospel, engaging the existential search that is going on, and facing the adaptive challenge of the 21st century.” See Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 211.

Missional Lifestyles

Missional lifestyles are ways of living (usually with a set of specific practices) that are based upon the missional life of Jesus. Various aspects of these lifestyles, such as serving or blessing others, sharing meals together, and sharing one's faith are covered below. In regards to seeking the lost through social networking, however, living a missional lifestyle involves several things.

First, just as the woman in the parable of the lost coin swept frantically in her own house to find the lost coin, Christians need to be fervently looking for the unchurched people in their midst with whom they can connect and build relationships. This often will not require Christians to add anything to their schedules, but to simply look for people to connect with in all of their normal weekly and daily interactions with other people. This will involve searching for points of common interest as they interact with unchurched people at work, at their children's extracurricular and sporting events and practices, where they shop, in their neighborhoods, in their families and wherever else they may go. By simply being faithful in attending the social events of their current circle of family and friends, such as children's birthday parties and holiday gatherings, Christians can greatly expand the number of unchurched people whom they know and with whom they have a relationship.

Second, just as the shepherd in the parable of the lost sheep left the ninety-nine to go after the lost sheep, Christians need to intentionally go after lost people—which may require them cutting back on internal “church activities” in order to have enough time to do this. Many times Christians fail to share their faith because they simply do not know anyone on any type of relational level who is not already a Christian. This failure to know

the unchurched can be overcome by encouraging Christians to intentionally place themselves in situations where they will be able to meet and build relationships with lost people. This intentionality can involve Christians exploring an interest or passion and joining a community group that shares this interest or passion, such as a book club, mom's group, or workout center. This seeking is most effective when it is done with at least one another Christian, following Jesus' model of sending out the disciples two by two. Going out with other Christians provides encouragement and accountability to those who are seeking, as well as a community witness to the unchurched.¹⁴ Christians can also frequent third places to meet people and build relationships. Though third places are hard to find in suburbia, in McKinney places like Starbucks, Chick-fil-a, and the local diner Bill's Café somewhat fit this category.¹⁵

Third, just as the father expectantly waited for the son to return in the parable of the lost son, Christians need to expectantly but patiently wait for the lost to show an openness and readiness to God in their lives. God is already present "in the neighborhood," working on people's hearts. Christians should therefore pray for discernment, that God may open their eyes to those around them that he has been working on who are open to following him.

If Christians will take up these seeking practices of looking for lost people in their midst, intentionally going after lost people, and waiting expectantly for lost people, God

¹⁴ M. Scott Boren, *Missional Small Groups: Becoming a Community That Makes a Difference in the World*, Allelon Missional Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 185.

¹⁵ Starbucks has marketed itself as a third place. Leonard I. Sweet and Edward H. Hammett, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2007), 12. For additional ideas on doing mission with other Christians see Hirsch and Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook*, 118.

will make lost people who are open to the gospel manifest in their lives. Yet, few Christians seem to know how to do this. Therefore, at High Pointe, the leadership has sought to give people some suggestions practices to help them be in proximity to the lost and learn how to reach them. Through various articles, blog posts, and small groups (including *The Story of Redemption*, discussed below), members have been exposed to some specific missional practices such as those of missional author Michael Frost. In his work, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*, Frost lays out some practical missional “rhythms” that he and his missional community have practiced, using the acronym “B.E.L.L.S.” These weekly practices are as follows: “bless” the lives of non-Christians, “eat” with them, “learn” about the life of Jesus from the gospels, “listen” to what the Scriptures and Spirit are saying from these gospel readings, and live a “sent” life.¹⁶ Blessing others falls into the serving category (covered below), and learning and listening help spiritually form people so that they can discern the lost people whom God is manifesting in their lives. It is eating with non-Christians and living as “a sent people” that falls most fully into the seeking category.

While these practices are excellent, in order to reach the lost that they encounter (and to realize where they are on their journey), Christians must also learn how to engage people that they are seeking in the lost art of spiritual conversation. At High Pointe the leadership has sought to help people learn this art by teaching people in Bible classes to make an “elevator speech” of their Christian faith that they can share with others. The

¹⁶ Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006).

leadership has also helped people talk about their faith using Richard Peace's *Holy Conversation* and Discovery Bible Study method in some of the church small groups.¹⁷

Seeker Small Groups

When Christians seek out the lost by living a missional lifestyle, eventually, some of the lost may begin to seek out God or the Christian faith or at least be open to fuller spiritual discussions. At this point, the “Christian seekers” can invite these “non-Christian seekers” into a “seeker small group.” Gary Poole, author of *Seeker Small Groups*, defines a seeker small group as “a community of roughly two to twelve seekers and one or two Christian leaders who gather on a regular basis, primarily to discuss spiritual matters.”¹⁸ In this paper, seeker small groups are defined as small groups made up of a mix of Christians and seekers (non-Christians or “unchurched” people who are receptive to exploring the Christian faith) that are intentionally created to engage these seekers in Bible study or conversation about spiritual matters, leading them further in their faith and helping them to place their trust in Jesus Christ.¹⁹ The main type of seeker small groups that have been formed at High Pointe has been *The Story of Redemption* Bible study

¹⁷ Richard Peace, *Holy Conversation: Talking About God in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006). In *Holy Conversation*, Christians are trained to ask non-Christians if they can be a spiritual dialogue partner on the spiritual topics covered in the book. The Discovery Bible Study method encourages spiritual conversation by having group members take a biblical passage, paraphrase it so that they can tell it to others, and make a commitment to share this biblical thought with someone else that week.

¹⁸ Garry Poole, *Seeker Small Groups: Engaging Spiritual Seekers in Life-Changing Discussions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 33.

¹⁹ This paper defines the “unchurched” as those who either do not worship with a Christian congregation at all or who only worship rarely and who do not consider themselves being an active part of any particular congregation. Attempts are made to have at least one third non-Christian or unchurched people in these seeker small groups so that the groups are not dominated by the perspectives of long-time Christians.

groups (discussed below). Additionally, the Dynamic Marriage and Financial Peace University small groups (also covered below) which have formed at High Pointe could be somewhat classified as seeker small groups.

Missional (Outreach) Small Group and Communities

As with the term “missional,” “missional small group” and “missional communities” are terms that can mean different things and that are currently being used in missional literature in different ways; however, there are at least two significant books on these subjects. M. Scott Boren, in his book, *Missional Small Groups*, gives three practices or rhythms of missional small groups: missional communion, missional relating, and missional engagement, which corresponds to a typical breakdown of church life into communion or worship, community or fellowship, and mission. Boren admits that placing missional in front of communion and relating is awkward, but he wants to emphasize that how one relates to God and to one another has an impact upon how one is received by the world. Mike Breen and Alex Absalom, in their work *Launching Missional Communities*, have a similar threefold division of up, in, and out for their missional communities.²⁰

While Boren, Breen, and Absalom have some excellent suggestions on missional small groups and missional communities, this three-fold division can pose problems if taken out of context. While any church must contain all three rhythms in its overall life,

²⁰ Poole, *Seeker Small Groups*, 33. Mike Breen and Alex Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities: A Field Guide* (Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Press, 2010).

by calling everything missional there is a chance that the term—and therefore the practice—becomes obscured, making nothing missional.²¹

Hirsch provides a better framing of how being missional (outward-focused) relates to the inner relationships of the group and to worship or praise of God. Hirsch makes the case that the primacy of mission must be upheld not only theologically, but practically, for without mission being the stated purpose of a small group, it will either remain, or over time become, inward focused. His full quote on this in *The Forgotten Ways* is excellent:

In a remark ascribed to Gordon Cosby, the pioneering leader of that remarkable community Church of the Savior in Washington D.C., he noted that in over sixty years of significant ministry, he had observed that no groups that came together around a non-missional purpose (e.g., prayer, worship, study etc.) ever ended up being missional. It was only those groups that set out to be missional (while embracing prayer, worship, study, etc., in the process) that actually got to doing it If evangelizing and discipling the nations lie at the heart of the church's purpose in the world, then it is mission, and not ministry, that is the true organizing principle of the church. *Mission* is being used in a narrow sense here to suggest the church's orientation to the "outsiders," and *ministry* as the orientation to the "insiders." Experience tells us that a church that aims at ministry seldom gets to mission even if it sincerely intends to do so. But the church that aims at mission will have to do ministry, because ministry is the means to mission.²²

Thus, following Hirsch's understanding, it would be best for missional groups and missional communities to state that missional outreach is the group's focus, and that things such as communion and relating can happen as the group engages in mission.²³

²¹ Boren himself states that mission would be the standard correspondent to missional engagement, but not to communion or relating. Boren, *Missional Small Groups*, 63.

²² Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 235-36.

²³ The threefold divisions of Boren, Breen, and Absalom must also be looked at in their contexts. All three authors advocate living out these rhythms amongst the people groups whom the missional group or missional communities adopt. In other words, these groups or communities view themselves as being sent first with an active seeking of a particular people group. Breen and Absalom very specifically define a missional community as being a "mid-size group" of "twenty to more than fifty people who are united

In this paper, missional (outreach) groups and communities are defined as containing the seeking, serving, and sharing elements as outlined in the missional outreach definition, with missional groups tending to be smaller (six to twelve adults) and missional communities tending to be larger (more than twelve adults), with the adoption of a particular people group.²⁴ Boren, Breen, and Absalom have an understanding of missional groups and communities that includes all of the elements of seeking, serving, and sharing as outlined in this paper; however, they advocate that the full expression of the church's life, including worship, be contained within the groups and communities. While our missional (outreach) groups and communities may contain these additional elements, they are not always fully included.

One significant point of difference that I have in regards to missional (outreach) small groups and communities in contrast to Boren's understanding is in the importance of intentionally trying to bring salvation to those that are being sought. Boren explains, "Missional engagement is not primarily about getting people saved. It has more to do with demonstrating God's life together than it has to do with many of the evangelism

through Christian community, around a common service and witness to a particular neighborhood or network of relationships . . . [They share] a common mission focus that is the key glue for the shared sense of togetherness." Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 18, 20. This self-understanding and adoption of a particular people group does indeed place a primacy upon mission, with the inward and upward practices providing a missional witness to the world and even being practiced in the locales of the people groups which they are trying to reach.

²⁴ This type of group outreach is similar to the outreach methods of (Saint) Patrick amongst the ancient Celts. Patrick's method for outreach was to form an apostolic or missionary team, who would spend weeks ministering to a local tribe. They would live within this tribe, bless them, and share the gospel in creative ways—song, dance, and the like. Over the course of time, the Celts would experience this Christian community, and even become a part of it prior to their public confession. This methodology fit with the creative Celts, and during Patrick's lifetime, thirty to forty of Ireland's one hundred and fifty fiercely independent and pagan tribes became Christian. This same pattern of "belonging before believing" exists in today's postmodern culture, and for most people, "the faith is about three-fourths caught and one-fourth taught." See George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West—Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 47-55.

models that have shaped the way we share Jesus' gospel."²⁵ While certainly the imperialistic, nominal producing, evangelism of the past is to be rejected, the idea that being missional is "not primarily about getting people saved" directly contradicts Jesus' self-understanding of mission, which most definitely included saving the lost. This shying away from evangelism and salvation is an over-reaction by many in the missional movement. While proximity, incarnational living, embedment in the community, and service towards a people group are excellent and necessary parts of missional outreach, this by itself is incomplete. There must be a concerted effort to bring salvation to the lost by intentionally sharing the good news with them in both deed (which the missional movement is very strong on) and word (which some in the missional movement have tended to shy away from).

Missional small groups and communities, as well as individual Christians and seeker small groups, ought to look for "people of peace" in their social networking. The person of peace concept is taken from Luke 10:5-7 in the "Limited Commission," where Jesus sends his disciples out on mission and tells them the following: "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house." This passage is often used and interpreted as indicating that there are people of peace in culture whom God has already prepared to be receptive to those who are sent out on mission. These people of peace open doors to a particular community, and when they are found, the missionary should stay with them (not go "house to house"), as they are fertile

²⁵ Boren, *Missional Small Groups*, 133.

ground for missional outreach. In missional circles, people of peace are usually assumed to have large social networks or realms of influence, with the ability to bring whole communities to faith in Christ.²⁶ Breen and Absalom write,

As you seek to go out and reach the lost with the Good News of Jesus, he gives you a simple strategy for doing just that. He tells you to look for the person who welcomes you, serves you, and responds to you. This person likes you and, probably, you like him or her. A Person of Peace will in time prove to be a gatekeeper to a whole network, or neighborhood, or relationships.²⁷

In truth, the conversion of whole communities happens much more readily in non-Western cultures which are already highly communal and already have strong social structures. In typical suburban culture, as has been outlined above, “community” is an aspect of the gospel that must usually be nurtured and even created. Still, there are people even in suburbia who are well connected, open to the gospel, and able to open doors to a particular social sub-group.²⁸

At High Pointe, several of the missional small groups that have formed have first started as seeker small groups using *The Story of Redemption*. During the study, the participants are challenged to begin seeking, serving, and sharing. As the participants take up this challenge, the group begins to transition to a more missional group.

²⁶ Church planter Travis Johnson gives four characteristics of a “person of peace”: 1) they extend friendship to those who are seeking; 2) buy into the message of Jesus; 3) give the seeker rest; and 4) open doors to a large social network which a seeker can engage. See Travis Johnson, “Person of Peace” <http://missionalcog.wordpress.com/2009/02/25/person-of-peace/> (accessed December 14, 2010). See also Paul D. Watson, “Are You Listening for Persons of Peace?” <http://www.reachingtheonlinegeneration.com/2009/10/14/are-you-listening-for-persons-of-peace/> (accessed December 14, 2010).

²⁷ Breen and Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities*, 19.

²⁸ It is not at all certain that this person of peace passage is meant to establish the prototypical pattern for mission, particularly in social settings that are separated by two thousand years and an even greater cultural distance; however, there are some aspects of missional outreach within this example, such as purposefully seeking the lost, being within proximity of lost people, and social networking, that certainly seem to make sense for most any context. For ideas on how to find a person of peace, see Gary Rohmayer, *Firststeps for Planting a Missional Church* (St. Charles, IL: Your Journey Resources, 2006), 50-51.

Sometimes this happens in the middle of the study; sometimes it happens at the end.

Missional groups that form in this way are usually more successful in reaching additional lost people, as the original seekers in the group often have a strong circle of unchurched family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

One example of this at High Pointe is *The Story of Redemption* seekers group that began in Melissa, Texas, a small town just north of McKinney. Of the original ten participants, three were seekers. Two of these, Cyndi and Lindsey, accepted Christ and were baptized, and Cyndi's husband Armando is an active participant in the group, which continues to meet. The group has been challenged to take up a missional lifestyle, particularly that of purposely seeking out non-Christians to be around and bless or serve each week. From these practices, Cyndi and Armando identified that their child's daycare worker, Yalonda, was overwhelmed from taking in needy children from homeless families. The group decided to adopt this childcare facility, providing love, care, prayer, and donations of diapers, food, and clothing. By adopting a particular network of people to reach out to, the group has transitioned to a missional small group.

Furthermore, it has become increasingly clear that Yalonda (in addition to Cyndi) is a person of peace and able to open the doors to reaching many people for Christ. Yalonda is an African-American woman who had had kidney failure. She was told that she needed to move to an area that had more minorities so that she might be able to find a match for an organ donor. She did indeed receive a transplant, and now she says that two people died for her—Christ, and the twenty-two year old who died and donated his organ, which she received. Though she has not been attending a church, she has done a tremendous amount of good in the community, opening the day care center, watching the

children of several needy families for free, and holding a weekly phone prayer session for these families. Since she works until eight o'clock at night each day, this missional small group has, in addition to adopting her daycare center, decided to move its small group meeting to the daycare center—seeking, serving, and sharing.

Additionally, two more *The Story of Redemption* seeker small groups have formed in Melissa. After the completion of these studies, hopefully two more missional small groups in this area will be formed out of the seeker groups, allowing the formation of a larger “missional community” in the Melissa area. Thus, it is clear that missional lifestyles, seeker small groups, missional small groups and communities, and people of peace all work together in seeking the lost.

Church Planting

Church planting and the missional movement have had a close relationship for some time. It is perhaps no coincidence that Hirsch's first published work was *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church*, co-written with Michael Frost, which was a handbook for church planters.²⁹ Those who have a missional understanding of the Church see church planting as being a natural outgrowth of a missional church, as church planters, like missionaries, are “sent out” by a church or parachurch organization to make new disciples of Christ and thus begin a new church. Besides being sent, church planting has a strong association with evangelism, an essential part of being missional. Peter Wagner, author of *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, has said, “The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting

²⁹ Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*.

new churches.”³⁰ This oft quoted statement has been proved true by research on church planting; however, in their work, Hirsch and Frost point towards the slowing of church planting after the 1990s, a phenomenon which they attribute in part to the planting of attractional, rather than missional, churches.³¹ As the population in the United States becomes more and more unchurched and post-Christendom, the “build it and they will come” type of approach towards church planting is becoming less and less effective. Missional church planting is the hope of the future.

Just as being missional and church planting go together, so too does social networking and church planting. In his book, *Church in the Making*, church planter Ben Arment describes the sad death of most church plants, which he attributes to the lack of social networking by the church planters who planted these churches. “I’m convinced that when God calls a planter to start a church, he calls him either to start a social network first (which can takes years) or simply to leverage the one he’s been building around him Bringing together a social network is one of the first things God does to create a church in the making.”³² Thus, the process of missional church planting follows the pattern of reaching out through social networking with missional lifestyles, seeker small groups, missional small groups and communities, and people of peace.

³⁰ C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest: A Comprehensive Guide* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990).

³¹ “The heart of the problem is that we have been planting churches that are (smaller) carbon copies of the already beleaguered, failing Christendom-style church The Christendom-mode church has these three flaws in its DNA—it is attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical.” Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 18.

³² Ben Arment, *Church in the Making* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 81-82.

High Pointe has begun setting aside funds for planting English-speaking church plants, but has not as of yet planted any of these types of churches (though some of the missional small groups that have formed could potentially develop in this direction); however, High Pointe has taken a significant step forward in planting missional, Latino churches. The need for planting missional Latino churches is tremendous, as the Latino population in the United States, Texas, and the Dallas/Fort Worth area is exploding.³³ This population tends to be nominally Catholic and in need of the gospel message. Furthermore, the recent immigrant status of many Latinos in the United States places them in a *liminal* state, making them potentially more receptive to the gospel. Additionally, because Latinos tend to be tighter-knit as a people group, with stronger family and cultural ties and living in closer proximity to one another, the person of peace concept works even more effectively with them.

High Pointe originally partnered with the Highland Oaks Church of Christ, a large, flagship church in the Dallas area, to form Genesis Alliance, which is now a non-profit devoted to planting missional, Latino churches in the Dallas area and beyond.³⁴ Sixto Rivera, the executive director of Genesis Alliance, has largely followed a “Church Planting Movements” methodology in these church plants, which is a missional strategy involving many of the elements listed in this paper, including going to where people are, finding people of peace, and sharing the gospel through Discovery Bible Study.³⁵ One of the Latino church plants that has been planted through Genesis Alliance and is directly

³³ Young and McNeill, "Population Growth Surging around Dallas."

³⁴ Sixto Rivera, "Genesis Alliance," <http://www.genalliance.org> (accessed March 11, 2011).

³⁵ V. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, VA: Office of Overseas Operations, International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1999).

connected to High Pointe meets in nearby Plano. This church draws from the McKinney area; however, another church plant will soon be planted in McKinney itself.

Online Social Networking and Strategies

Person to person social networking has been used in the spread of the gospel ever since the women who left the empty tomb told the disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and the gospel has spread in this form for two thousand years. Now, however, the gospel can be spread instantaneously through a new form of social networking—“online” social networking that uses the Internet. Though it has limitations, the power and potential of this new medium for gospel transmission is unparalleled in history.

Online Social Networking with Facebook

In seeking the lost through online social networking, there are two primary options for churches and individuals. The first approach would be to create a “seeker site” and invite non-Christians to join the site. While this could have some value, it is analogous to opening a “Christian” coffee shop. Only those who are already looking for and are comfortable with Christianity will be likely to frequent this site. A more fully missional approach would be to go into coffee shops that are already frequented by non-Christians. This “go to the customer” type of online approach for companies is advocated by the authors of *Groundswell*, who say that “if your customers already have communities . . . then it’s best to participate in those communities rather than build your

own.”³⁶ Thus, the most fully missional approach for seeking the lost through online social networking is for churches and individual churches to “go out” to online, interactive sites that non-Christians use and engage them there. While there are numerous interactive sites on the web, any online missional outreach strategy must include the powerhouse of online social networking sites, Facebook.

There are several elements to effectively using Facebook (or Facebook type sites) to seek the lost online. First, Christians should be encouraged to join the site so that they may be in “proximity” to the millions of other Facebook users, just as Christians are encouraged offline to go to places that the unchurched frequent. Of course, with the phenomenal growth of Facebook, a tremendous percentage of Christians are already a part of this site and have hundreds of “Facebook friends.”³⁷ Second, Christians should be encouraged to proactively “Facebook friend” their current circle of nonchurched family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers to allow for sharing and messaging with them. This strategy must be combined with real world social networking and missional lifestyles, as friending total strangers with whom one has little or no connection, while possible, goes

³⁶ Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff, *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2008), 149. I first began to write on online social networking and evangelism in 2009. James Nored, “Online Social Networking and Evangelism” (a paper written in the course, “OD728: Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix,” Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009).

³⁷ It should be noted that the use of the term “friend” on Facebook is quite generous. In the real world, anyone claiming to have three hundred, seven hundred, or thousands of friends (as is often found on Facebook) would obviously have a definition of friendship that is different from the norm. Sociologists have theorized that people can have some type of relationship with up to perhaps one hundred fifty people (called Dunbar’s number). See Matthew Fraser and Soumitra Dutta, *Throwing Sheep in the Boardroom: How Online Social Networking Will Transform Your Life, Work, and World* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008), 48.

against the culture of Facebook.³⁸ Facebook can, however, strengthen a weak real world tie with an unchurched friend, co-worker, acquaintance, or neighbor. Third, as in real life, Christians should seek to truly be a friend to these unchurched “Facebook friends” by taking an active interest in their lives—which in Facebook involves commenting on their friends’ walls, pictures, videos, and posts.³⁹

Online Social Networking with Other Sites and Technologies

While Facebook is the predominant online social networking site and therefore a primary tool for seeking the lost, there are other social sites and technologies that can help in this mission as well. One social networking tool that is increasingly proving to be useful in missional outreach is Twitter. Twitter is a type of microblogging platform which uses short text messages that are limited to 140 characters. Like Facebook, Twitter has grown at a phenomenal rate; however, unlike Facebook, Twitter is naturally set up to allow users to follow people that they do not know, as no permission is required to follow those that make their “tweets” (their Twitter updates) public.⁴⁰ A good missional outreach strategy for Twitter is for Christians to use Twitter, various Twitter sites, and third party

³⁸ Being “friended” by total strangers is much more likely on MySpace than on Facebook; however, this random friending has been one of several factors that have led many young people to migrate from MySpace to Facebook as their social network of choice. S. Craig Watkins, *The Young and the Digital: What the Migration to Social-Network Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for Our Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 62, 75-101.

³⁹ The potential for these connections to reach people should not be underestimated. Most jobs are not obtained by direct connections, but by friends of friends (also referred to as “weak ties” or one’s “extended network”). Furthermore, 83 percent of online users trust the online recommendations of friends and acquaintances, and more than half trust the recommendations of strangers. Li and Bernoff, *Groundswell*, 102. Younger generations do not view these extended relationships as “shallow” Fraser and Dutta, *Throwing Sheep in the Boardroom*, 56.

⁴⁰ In April 2009, this microblogging technology had grown to 17 million registered users, up an incredible 3000 percent in one year. Jon Swartz, “Twitter Has Millions Tweeting in Public Communication Service” (2009), http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/technology/2009-05-25-twitter-founders-social-networking_N.htm (accessed May 26, 2009).

Twitter applications to follow people in their local area, take an interest in their lives, engage them in conversation, and eventually invite them to meet for coffee, prayer, worship, or service.⁴¹

Blogging is another type of online social networking technology that can be used in reaching the lost; however, the rise of Facebook and Twitter has caused blogging to begin its decline.⁴² Facebook and Twitter take less time both to update and to read, and they are more popular with younger users. In many ways, Facebook and Twitter are also simply better missional outreach tools. Facebook is more naturally interactive, personal and universal, therefore leading to closer friendships, while Twitter is better at finding and reaching out to new people.

Despite these challenges, blogging can still play a role in missional outreach, particularly with church leaders. By exhibiting kindness, humility, and cultural awareness, ministers can help dispel some of the concerns that non-Christians have about Christians. Also, by mixing in appropriate personal disclosure, moments of doubt, global concerns, and help with spiritual matters, ministers can make themselves (and therefore their churches) approachable and relevant.⁴³ Blogging can make a large church more intimate, and it can help a minister spread a vision for missional outreach on a more personal level. At High Pointe, I have blogged since beginning this ministry in 2008, and

⁴¹ Twitter site “Nearby Tweets” allows Twitter to find Twitter users in a certain city who “tweet” certain keywords. Brian Cray, “Nearby Tweets,” <http://nearbytweets.com/> (accessed May 20, 2009).

⁴² Verne G. Kopytoff, “Blogs Wane as the Young Drift to Sites Like Twitter,” *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/21/technology/internet/21blog.html?_r=3&src=busln (accessed March 17, 2011).

⁴³ Donald Miller’s “confession booth,” is a good example of the type of humility and transparency that resonates today with non-Christians. See Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003).

my blog has been directly built into the website.⁴⁴ This has helped High Pointe members grow in their understanding of, support of, and participation in their outreach efforts, and quite a number of visitors have read one or more of these blogs prior to deciding to worship at High Pointe.⁴⁵

Another way that online social networking can be used to seek the lost is through preparing individuals and churches for this task by collaboration, pooling resources, and problem solving. Social theorists have long recognized the “wisdom of crowds”—that a large group of people tends to come up with the right answer much of the time.⁴⁶ Now, with the Internet, the combined wisdom and power of millions, potentially billions, of people connected across the globe is staggering. Businesses have been on the cutting edge of understanding the problem-solving potential that comes from connecting millions of people on the Internet, and much of these insights can be applied to missional outreach.⁴⁷ If an online community could be formed around missional outreach with effective online social networking principles, the potential for providing positive

⁴⁴ See James Nored, "James' Random, Stimulating, Missional, Spiritual Thoughts," <http://jamesnored.blogspot.com> (accessed May 20, 2009). This blog was begun in 2005.

⁴⁵ For vision-casting and reaching out through blogs, see Brian Bailey and Terry Storch, *The Blogging Church: Sharing the Story of Your Church through Blogs*, 1st ed., Leadership Network (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 35-51. These visitor reports are based upon conversations that I and other members have had with visitors of High Pointe.

⁴⁶ James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies, and Nations*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 45. Jeff Howe, *Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd Is Driving the Future of Business*, 1st ed. (New York: Crown Business, 2008), 159. The irony, however, of “collective intelligence” is that it is the diversity of the participants, not crowd-like behavior, which enables the “wisdom of crowds.” See Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, Exp. ed. (New York: Portfolio, 2008), 80.

⁴⁷ An example of this problem solving is the “Goldcorp Challenge.” Tapscott and Williams, *Wikinomics*, 80.

solutions for missional outreach could be profound. Based upon this premise, I created an online community called the “Missional Outreach Network” to meet the above criteria.⁴⁸

The Missional Outreach Network has achieved some modicum of success and has already proven to be valuable in preparation for missional outreach in many ways.⁴⁹ The site has helped bring about missional transformation through the sharing of how God is at work in mission. This storytelling helps change the heart and heroes of a congregation, an essential step in missional transformation.⁵⁰ The participants have been able to share stories, pictures, videos from outreach ministries and missional living online, which I have also been able to share in sermons and through the church bulletin, creating a positive feedback loop for these ministries. These stories, of course, reinforce missional concepts for the participants in the site as well. Numerous “problems” have also been solved and resources shared during this time, and members have found evangelistic Bible studies, spiritual gifts assessments, inspiring stories and blog posts on missional outreach, missional books and seminars, missional sermons, pictures of people engaged in mission and service, videos on mission, and much more.

⁴⁸ This is a Ning-based site, and many High Pointe members and people throughout the United States and around the world are participating in this community. See Marc Andreessen and Gina Bianchini, “Ning” <http://ning.com> (accessed May 21, 2009); and James Nored, “Missional Outreach Network,” <http://missionaloutreachnetwork.com> (accessed May 21, 2009). Another key missional site of this nature is Lance Ford et. al., “Shapevine,” <http://shapevine.com> (accessed May 21, 2009).

⁴⁹ The site was begun in November 2008 and has grown to nearly eight hundred members. It is clear that the Missional Outreach Network has passed a crucial first stage of development, with enough content, activity, and value to keep the members coming back to the site. This is no mean feat. See Li and Bernoff, *Groundswell*, 123.

⁵⁰ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 250-254. See also the discussion of “missional imagination” in Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 146-52.

CHAPTER 6

A MISSIONAL OUTREACH STRATEGY FOR SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Spiritual Gifts Definition, Theology, and Discovery Process

Jesus said, “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mk 10:45), and this was an essential part of his mission. As he sought the lost, Jesus was empowered by the Spirit to serve humanity, “saving” or healing them from their brokenness. In the same way, Christians are called to serve using their spiritual gifts. Definitions of spiritual gifts abound; however, most see spiritual gifts as abilities given by God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit, for some kind of ministry purpose.^{1 2}

¹ I first began to write on spiritual gifts and their use in evangelism in 2008. See James Nored, “Spiritual Gifts Discovery and Use and Its Impact Upon Evangelism” (a paper written for the course, “EV715: Reinventing Evangelism: New Perspectives on Outreach, Conversion and Discipleship,” Fuller Theological Seminary, 2008). Alan Roxburgh and Van Gelder rightly note that the Spirit’s role in ministry goes beyond spiritual gifts. See Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 24. However, spiritual gifts are a significant way that the Spirit works in and through Christ-followers to help them participate in God’s mission, particularly when combined with a discernment process of how the Spirit is at work in the world and in the Christ-follower’s life as is advocated below. Frost and Hirsch place a significant emphasis upon spiritual gifts in the outworking of mission in Christ-followers, particularly the five-fold gifts of Ephesians 4:11: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. See Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 165-81.

² These spiritual gifts definitions are fundamentally theological, or related to an understanding of God. Peter Wagner writes, “A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ, according to God’s grace, for use within the context of the Body.” Bryan Caraway writes, “Spiritual gifts are supernatural endowments and abilities that are selectively given to every Christian by the Holy Spirit for the purposes of personal ministry and for the advancement of the kingdom of God.” Erick Rees contends that a spiritual gift is “a God-given ability, given to every believer at

There are four main New Testament passages on spiritual gifts from which typical definitions and understandings of spiritual gifts come (Rm 12:1-21, 1 Cor 12:1-31, Eph 4:7-16, and 1 Pt 4:7-11). There are several points to be made from these passages. First, spiritual gifts are from God and bring grace into *every* believer's life (Eph 4:7) for they are apportioned to "each of us" by Christ (Eph 4:7), chosen and allotted by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:11), and activated by God (1 Cor 12:6). Second, the use of spiritual gifts in a Christian community demonstrates Christ's conquering of evil (Eph 4:8-10). Third, spiritual gifts are to be used in service to others (1 Pt 4:1). While the above points are all drawn from the biblical passage on spiritual gifts and are valid, this understanding of spiritual gifts must be placed in the overall context of a missional theology—something which is missed by most spiritual gifts authors. It should be noted that spiritual gifts are spoken of in the context of the body of Christ. As the body of Christ, we must take up the mission of Christ. Once this body of Christ metaphor is taken seriously, it becomes clear that spiritual gifts are an essential part of God's plan to fulfill his mission.³

Based upon this theological framing, this paper will define spiritual gifts in the following way: "Spiritual gifts are abilities (and/or functions) which are given to

conversion by the Holy Spirit, to share his love and strengthen the body of Christ." Leslie B. Flynn states, "A gift is a Spirit-given ability for Christian service." Bruce Bugbee writes, "Spiritual gifts are divine abilities distributed by the Holy Spirit to every believer according to God's design and grace for the common good of the body of Christ." Kenneth Cain Kinghorn states, "A spiritual gift is a supernatural ability or capacity given by God to enable the Christian to minister and serve." Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts*, 32; Erik Rees, *S.H.A.P.E.: Finding and Fulfilling Your Unique Purpose for Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 34; Leslie B. Flynn, *19 Gifts of the Spirit* (Colorado Springs, CO: NexGen, 2004), 26; Bruce Bugbee, *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ: Discover Your Spiritual Gifts, Personal Style, and God-Given Passion*, Rev. and Exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 38; Bryan Carraway, *Spiritual Gifts: Their Purpose and Power* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, 1995), 59.

³ Lloyd Edwards writes, "We must continually remind ourselves that the purpose of the gifts is for the restoration of the world. All ministry is ultimately for that purpose. When most of the gifts of the members are used only within the parish, it has lost its balance in favor of introversion; it risks becoming ineffective in the world." Lloyd Edwards, *Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1988), 38.

believers and the church by the Spirit to serve God and others and fulfill the mission of Christ.”⁴ Drawing upon the four main New Testament passages that list various Spiritual gifts (Rm 12:1-21; 1 Cor 12:1-31; Eph 4:7-16; 1 Pt 4:7-11), these are the spiritual gifts that I have identified in the practical work *Using Your Spiritual Gifts*, which includes a spiritual gifts assessment survey:⁵ Administration (Coordination of People/Projects), Administration (Tasks),⁶ “Apostolic”/Missional Leadership,⁷ Discernment, Encouragement, Evangelism, Faith, Giving, Helping, Hospitality, Knowledge, Leadership, Mercy, Pastoral Care/Shepherding, Prayer, Prophetic Ministry,⁸ Service, Speaking, Teaching, and Wisdom. The rationale for these definitions is laid out in the

⁴ Evangelism is an essential part of Christ’s mission, and therefore spiritual gifts are tremendously important for the church’s evangelistic endeavors. Furthermore, because spiritual gifts are *spiritual*, each gift reflects some aspect of God. Indeed, in the practical work that I have produced, *Using Your Spiritual Gift*, I have an underlying assumption that, because he had the “Spirit without limit,” Jesus had all of the spiritual gifts (John 3:33). So as Christians exercise their gifts, they not only help the church in its evangelistic endeavors, but they themselves are transformed and become more like God.

⁵ James Nored, *Using Your Spiritual Gifts* (McKinney, TX: PrintRight, 2008).

⁶ The division of administration into two parts, coordination of people/projects and tasks, is based on doing numerous assessments with people on this gift. I observed that many had organizational skills who did not have coordination skills for large projects or “management” of people. On the other hand, most everyone who has the administration skills for people and projects seems to also have administrative tasks skills as well.

⁷ I have been greatly influenced by Alan Hirsch in recognizing some form of this gift today. Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, and Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 149-77.

⁸ As D. A. Carson states, the varying thoughts on the nature of New Testament prophecy are “legion.” Various positions include: 1) an emphasis upon social justice, right and wrong, and consistency in a godly lifestyle; 2) preaching or expounding of Scripture; 3) some form of direct revelation; or 4) some combination of positions one through three. D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 91-106. In the practical work, *Using Your Spirit Gifts*, the first definition is included under the gift of “Prophetic Ministry” and the second definition is included under the gift of “Speaking.” The third definition could be included in either the Prophetic Ministry or Speaking gift, for both those who are concerned about social justice and those who preach in some way “hear the voice of God.” Wayne Grudem has made a case for some form of continuing revelation. Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000). For a rebuttal, see Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Verse-by-Verse Study of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 123-73.

study, and this rationale is based upon word and concept study, differentiation between gifts, and seeking to define as many gifts as possible.⁹

The next question to be asked is, How do people discover these spiritual gifts? It must be recognized that Scripture does not give any specific process for spiritual gifts discovery; however, people can be helped to discover their spiritual gifts by encouraging them to follow a few practical steps and biblical principles: 1) become familiar with the various types of spiritual gifts; 2) pray that God will help them to discover and use their gifts; 3) reflect on the areas of ministry about which they are most passionate—this is a good sign of giftedness; 4) try serving in several different areas;¹⁰ 5) when they think that they have found their gifts, seek confirmation from the body; 6) when they exercise their gifts, they ought to be a blessing to them and to the body; and 7) once they discover their gifts, they ought to look at them in light of their natural strengths, for this provides a guide to how they use their spiritual gifts. When people discover their spiritual gifts, they receive a sense of self-worth, value, and even excitement. Malphurs and Mancini state that “assessment helps Christians discern and reaffirm how God has uniquely designed them to serve him.”¹¹ While some downplay the need for these assessments,¹² surveys of

⁹ The gifts of healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and working of miracles are not included in this work. These gifts, often called the “miraculous gifts,” have long been debated as to whether or not they are ongoing gifts that have been given to the church today. Wayne A. Grudem, ed. *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: 4 Views*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

¹⁰ Greg Ogden states: “Most people will discover their ministries by doing or experimentation rather than through the cerebral approach of a class.” Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 182.

¹¹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 138.

¹² There does need to be transparency about how these surveys are designed. This lack of transparency seems to be the fundamental flaw of most of the Spiritual gifts surveys. All authors must make choices in how they define their gifts due to the gifts being found in lists and certain gifts possibly

those who have gone through the spiritual gifts discovery process indicate that this process is very helpful.¹³

Service through Spiritual Gifts in Daily Living and Ministry Teams

The corporate witness of the local church is powerful, and evangelism that is done by the church community is vital. Still, most Christians spend the vast majority of their time in situations where the gathered church community is not present. Even if members attend weekly worship, a Bible class, and a small group outreach, this amount of time pales in comparison to the amount of time that Christians spend at work, going to recreational events, attending children's extra-curricular activities, and being with their families. All of this time represents tremendous potential for evangelism.¹⁴

overlapping with other gifts (for instance, the gifts of service and helping); however, these choices and the reasoning behind the choices needs to be disclosed. Another flaw is that some of the definitions in the surveys seem to be based upon suppositions, rather than word and concept study. Sometimes these definitions are defined in such a way that they actually violate biblical examples. For instance, Don and Katie Fortune say that a teacher "is definitely not drawn to street witnessing or door-to-door evangelism." Don Fortune and Katie Fortune, *Discover Your God-Given Gifts* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1987), 103. The Book of Acts, however, records the opposite (Acts 5:42). Additionally, most of the spiritual gifts surveys are from those with a fully charismatic understanding of gifts, including miracle-working, healing, and tongue-speaking. These would not be suitable for my fellowship, which largely holds a cessationist view. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts: A Personal Inventory Method* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981). C. Peter Wagner, *Discover Your Spiritual Gifts* (Regal, CA: Ventura, 2002). Paul R. Ford, *Getting Your Gifts in Gear*, Rev. ed. (ChurchSmart Resources, 2000). *Using Your Spiritual Gifts* provides a survey that is usable for those who are cautious about (or reject) the existence of these types of gifts today but who do believe in the ongoing existence of the rest of the spiritual gifts.

¹³ A great majority of respondents at the previous church where I developed and used the spiritual gifts inventory, the Liberty Church of Christ, who were surveyed indicated that this process helped affirm gifts that they knew they had (69 percent), discover additional gifts (60 percent), think more about how to use their gifts (71 percent), and take more responsibility for using their gifts (65 percent). Thirty-one percent even indicated that they had a greater sense of God's working in their personal lives. All of these results of the process are necessary for effective evangelism. All of these results of the process are necessary for effective evangelism. See Nored, "Spiritual Gifts Discovery and Use and Its Impact Upon Evangelism."

¹⁴ Scott Jones agrees with Abraham that evangelism must primarily be associated with the congregation; however, he criticizes Abraham for leaving the role of the individual out of evangelism. Scott J. Jones, *The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 74.

There are two challenges that exist in making these other times in Christians' lives missional. First, many Christians have a sacred/secular divide in their lives. "God time" is what happens on Sunday, while the rest of the week is seen as time without God. Many Christians simply are not looking to serve God or others in these "secular" places, and this often reflects the practical theology of their church leaders. Church leaders, and thus members, tend to see ministry as what happens in a building, and they have sometimes ignored other aspects of Christians' lives. In fact, one Christian has stated, "I must conclude that my church really doesn't have the least interest whether or how I minister in my daily work."¹⁵ Second, since most Christians do not have the gifts of Missional Leadership or Evangelism, they often do not see how they can share their faith or be used in missional outreach.¹⁶ Guiding people through a well-constructed spiritual gifts discovery process can overcome both of these challenges.

In the spiritual gifts discovery process that I have developed, Christians are encouraged to utilize their gifts not only in church ministries, but also in their families and in the world, workplace, and neighborhood settings. When they interact with the unchurched, they should have a spirit of "seeking"—looking for lost people—and then use their gifts, whatever they are, to serve others and bless the lives of those around them by living a missional lifestyle (as discussed above). The concept of blessing others goes back to the Abrahamic covenant, in which Abraham was blessed so that he could be a

¹⁵ W. Diehl, *Christianity and the Real Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1976), v.

¹⁶ For a training book to help all Christians share their faith, see Peace, *Holy Conversation*.

blessing to others.¹⁷ Of course, using one's spiritual gifts to serve the unchurched in daily life is an effective and natural way to bless others. At High Pointe, the B.E.L.L.S. acronym (based on Frost's *Exile* and discussed above) and concept of blessing others through one's spiritual gifts has been introduced through sermons, bulletin articles, spiritual gifts assessments, and through *The Story of Redemption* (which will be discussed in further detail below). Seekers and new converts are being taught from the beginning of their Christian walk that blessing others/serving is an essential part of what it means to be a Christ-follower. Long-time Christians are also being challenged to move their faith from beyond the classroom and mere knowledge to implementation by blessing others.

One High Pointe member who went through the spiritual gifts assessment and took up this challenge is Debra. Debra is a divorced mother who is a school teacher and women's basketball coach. She has spiritual gifts in Teaching, Encouragement, Mercy, Wisdom, and Speaking. There are, of course, numerous ways that she could use these gifts in her unchurched settings, but as she went through the assessment, the idea of using her Teaching gift to share weekly devotionals with her co-workers came to her. Since that time, she has written and shared a weekly devotional thought online and by email, and it has impacted not only her co-workers, but her own life. Debra wrote this back to me after her assessment: "I just want to thank you so much for encouraging me to use my strengths [and spiritual gifts]. I have benefited so much from sharing my weekly devos with my co-workers. It's amazing how people minister to you in return for ministering unto them. I feel so blessed! It's definitely given me purpose and direction."

¹⁷ This concept of blessing others in daily living is also a major emphasis of Reggie McNeal, particularly in his work *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 46-49.

As Debra indicates, this type of missional lifestyle or “service evangelism” often leads those who are served to question why they are the recipients of such blessing, which gives Christians an opportunity to share a message about Christ.¹⁸ Service evangelism is an effective method in reaching people today, and the spiritual gifts process helps people engage in this type of missional outreach.^{19 20}

High Pointe’s Practices and Community Service Teams that Address the Brokenness of Suburbia

If the Church is to be Christ to the world, it must seek to provide healing for the brokenness in the world. This is an essential part of missional outreach. This paper has argued that three of the major areas of brokenness in suburbia are lack of community/isolation, lack of time/busyness, and lack of purpose/materialism. If these are indeed areas of brokenness, the Church must seek to address them through its various practices—the ingrained habits and responses of the church—and through the community

¹⁸ Steve Sjogren says, “Deeds of kindness get people’s attention and often cause them to ask us questions.” Steve Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness: A Refreshing New Approach to Sharing the Love of Jesus with Others* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1993).

¹⁹ In our postmodern world, fixed, presentational forms of evangelism in which Christians attempt to manipulate and monopolize the conversation to their own ends rarely work. For new methodologies of personal evangelism to reach a postmodern culture, see Rick Richardson, *Evangelism Outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000). Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002). Brian McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism in a Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

²⁰ At the Liberty Church of Christ, the discovery process had some of its greatest impact in this type of personal evangelism. While the respondents indicated that they had thought more about or better served people in their families (52 percent) and in the church (65 percent), they reported the highest numbers in how they thought about or served people in the world, workplace, or neighborhood (79 percent). Forty-eight percent said that they were able to better share their faith or help non-Christians come to faith in some way, and 58 percent said that they believed the church would better be able to fulfill its mission and reach the lost if most members went through this process. Sixty percent highly recommended the discovery process, and an additional 35 percent recommended it. Nored, “Spiritual Gifts Discovery and Use and Its Impact Upon Evangelism.”

service teams that form out of the hearts, passions, and spiritual giftedness of its members.

Serving by Healing the Brokenness of Lack of Community/Isolationism

As discussed in Chapter 2, the suburbs suffer greatly from a lack of community and a sense of isolation. This is a true area of brokenness, for God created humanity to live in relationship with one another. The missional church in suburbia can address this area of brokenness through hospitality, community formation through small groups, and online community formation.

Hospitality

First, in order to address the brokenness of lack of community and isolation that is found in suburbia, as well as the brokenness of poverty, High Pointe must recover the ancient practice of hospitality. While this paper has included hospitality as a spiritual gift, and undoubtedly some Christians will be more gifted in this than others, it is a practice which is found throughout Scripture and to which all Christians are called in some way. One of the key terms found in the New Testament for hospitality is φιλοξενία, literally “love of stranger” (see Rm 12:13; Heb 13:2; 1 Tm 3:2; Ti 1:8; 1 Pt 4:9). To be hospitable in this sense is to extend the love and kindness that is usually reserved for family and friends to strangers.²¹

The care and treatment of aliens and strangers is found throughout the Bible, beginning with Abraham in Genesis 18. In this story, Abraham entertains three guests,

²¹ For ancient travelers, this was an essential practice, for there were few inns that were safe and available. This practice included the protection of the guests by the host and the community, and it almost always involved the sharing of meals together. See Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 19.

and through this encounter God appears to him. In her book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Christine D. Pohl writes, “This first formative story of the biblical tradition on hospitality is unambiguously positive about welcoming strangers. It connects hospitality with the presence of God, with promise, and with blessing.”²² Abraham’s descendants become strangers in Egypt, which then lays the groundwork of Israel becoming a welcoming community. Encapsulated in the law were instructions on hospitality based upon Israel’s experience, such as, “Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt” (Ex 22:21; see also Dt 10:17-20; 24:14-15). Strangers and aliens who acknowledged God’s rule were often allowed to participate in the religious life of Israel (see Dt 29:10-14; Nm 9:14; 15:14-16), though certain restrictions applied. On the whole, strangers and aliens were to be welcomed and protected. God’s people themselves depended upon hospitality, as the stories of Elijah staying with the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17-18) and Elisha staying with a wealthy Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4:9) show. But the clearest examples of hospitality in Scripture focus upon Jesus. He himself was a stranger in this world, not recognized by the world (Jn 1:10); however, he reached out to the world, welcoming strangers and seeking to know them through conversation (i.e., the woman at the well in Jn 4:1-26) and the sharing of meals together with those who had been marginalized in society.²³

High Pointe has numerous opportunities to practice of hospitality of “aliens” for several reasons. First, there is a high percentage of Hispanics in East McKinney, many of

²² Pohl, *Making Room*, 24.

²³ The Book of Luke particularly highlights Jesus’ hospitality ministry, recording ten meals that Jesus shared with people. For an analysis of these meals and their significance, see John Mark Hicks, *Come to the Table: Revisioning the Lord's Supper* (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2002), 55.

whom do not speak English and have recently arrived in the United States. Second, due to the church building's location right off of a major highway and its proximity to the local jail, there are a number of newly released convicts, itinerant, and homeless people who come to the church building for help. Third, in sociological terms, the suburbs are full of "strangers"—those who feel disconnected and alone—of all ethnicities from all socio-economic levels. Pohl states that hospitality is "an important, even essential, place in our fractured, individualistic, results-oriented society."²⁴ Suburbanites are in desperate need of hospitality.

As a church, High Pointe has done several things to practice hospitality. Those who come into the church office who are homeless or have immediate physical needs are often helped and prayed with by the office and ministry staff and, on occasion, even invited into homes.²⁵ The church has also hosted a "Faith, Family and Friends" night on Wednesday nights once a month, which is a fellowship meal in which the food pantry and clothes closet "customers" (the church's name for those who are served in these ministries) are invited to share with High Pointe members. By sitting down and having meals with these customers and praying with them, they hopefully feel love and kindness and a warm welcome. Members are also encouraged to practice hospitality by inviting people in the world into the intimacy of their homes. This type of "missional hospitality"

²⁴ Pohl, *Making Room*, 9.

²⁵ Homelessness has structural and local causes (including economic, political, social conditions), as well as individual causes (including family background, education, skills, financial resources, immigration issues, and more). Bruhn, *The Sociology of Community Connections*, 79. The recent national economic downturn, including the tremendous number of home foreclosures, is a structural cause that has intensified the homeless situation across the nation and in McKinney.

is often foreign for suburbanites, for the home is the ultimate sanctuary for the family.²⁶

As they do this, however, they begin to heal their neighbors' feelings of isolation and lack of community.²⁷

Community Formation through Small Groups

Second, in order to address isolation and form community, the church should invite non-Christians to be part of various types of small groups. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow states that "the fragmented lives that many of us lead provide an incentive to seek community in support groups."²⁸ Indeed, the need for community is so great that even secular small groups that provide caring can provide community; however, Wuthnow goes on to say that "the religious traditions that are so much a part of American culture *legitimate* this quest by telling us that community is important, and, indeed, by leading us to believe that community is also the way to find spirituality and transcendence."²⁹ Thus, small groups offered by the Church not only provide community and heal the brokenness of isolation, but because they make the claim that community is part of God's plan, they provide a gateway to discovering God himself.

Small group ministry can take a number of different forms with varying emphases and still help the participants feel a sense of community. Indeed, Wuthnow lists sixteen

²⁶ Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford, *Right Here, Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People*, Shapevine (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 163.

²⁷ The practice of hospitality in homes also brings about many opportunities for modeling the Christian faith. See Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 94; and Pohl, *Making Room*, 155.

²⁸ Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 31.

²⁹ Ibid.

major types of “support groups” or small groups.³⁰ Many of these groups address other areas of brokenness, such as lack of peace or lack of purpose. The missional outreach type of small groups that have developed out of the spiritual giftedness of High Pointe members will be covered in the appropriate sections below.

There is, however, a particular type of structure of small group that is especially good in community formation that churches ought to seek to include in their small group ministry and that should be highlighted: neighborhood-based, geographical, multi-generational small groups. Randy Frazee, author of *The Connecting Church*, offers many insights to community-bonding, including the idea that in order to be a community, it must have a “common place.” By organizing small groups around geography, as he suggests, those who live close to one another are able to spontaneously “drop in” at other times. By holding some meetings outside on the front lawn, neighbors who are not part of the group may join in the meal, ask questions, and naturally participate in this Christian community. Another characteristic of true community is that there is diversity. While socio-economic conditions may remain rather homogenous in geographic small groups, it is likely that the groups will be able to be intergenerational, providing a diversity of age. As neighbors happen by or are invited into the group, they may discover the grandparents, parents, siblings, or children that are missing from their lives.³¹

The Story of Redemption small group in Melissa was intentionally geographic. Sandy and Cindy are a middle-aged couple who live in Melissa who have used their gifts of Hospitality to open their home to this study to several younger families also live in this

³⁰ Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 65.

³¹ Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 2895.

town. Due to the generational mixing, Sandy and Cindy have been able to play the roles of father and mother figures to some of the young couples, as well as the role of grandparents to their children. This has been especially true for one young family in particular, Armando and Cyndi and their three young boys. Armando is originally an immigrant from Mexico, and Cyndi is a second generation Cuban-American who grew up in Hawaii and is estranged from her parents. Due to their immigrant and family status, Armando and Cyndi have gravitated to Sandy and Cindy, with Armando often seeking out Sandy for fatherly advice.³² Cindy watched the children during the study portion of the meetings, playing a grandparent type of role which allowed the meeting to be possible for those with children.³³ In addition, the close geographic proximity of all of the families in the group has allowed the group to better socialize together and watch one another's children during times of sickness, vacation, or a much needed personal break. Cyndi has become friends with and works out with Lindsey, a single mother who is a part of the group and lives nearby.³⁴ When Cyndi posted on Facebook that she wanted to go on a vacation but had no one to watch her children, Lindsey, as well as others in the group,

³² Sandy has become to Armando what Wuthnow refers to as "someone to admire." Those who play this role "are like Jesus to the disciples. They are the mentors, fulfilling the biblical mandate of older women teaching younger women and older men teaching younger men." Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 274.

³³ There is tremendous felt need for childcare amongst those considering small groups. According to Wuthnow, 26 percent of all groups say that they provide childcare. Ibid., 94-95.

³⁴ Cyndi and Lindsey have become what Wuthnow calls "confidants." A confidant is a one-on-one relationship with someone else in the group with whom a person shares a "common destiny in life." They identify with one another, and may have very similar life circumstances. In this case, Cyndi and Lindsey are both young mothers who have gone through very challenging life circumstances, which help them to relate to one another. According to Wuthnow, 51 percent of those who are in a faith-based small group say that having a confidant is very helpful to their spiritual growth. Wuthnow says that this is especially true for those who "are worried about health problems, figuring out what's important in life, or experiencing difficulties with their work." Ibid., 272. Cyndi has gone through three job changes during the time the small group has been meeting, and was recently diagnosed with a major illness. Lindsey's father committed suicide two years ago.

responded that she would watch the children. This community formation has been helped by the geographic proximity of the participants and by their generational diversity.

Small groups also provide an opportunity for a diversity of gifts to be used throughout the group's various stages and life, potentially making the small group more successful in both community formation and its mission.³⁵ No one person except Jesus would ever likely perform all of the roles that are needed in a small group on his or her own, which is why a Christian community is needed.

Online Community Formation

The lack of true community in suburban America, the increasing delinking of geography with community, as well as profound advances in web 2.0 technology, has contributed to the formation and rise of the concept of online communities.³⁶ There is, however, still much debate as to whether or not an "online community" that forms from sites such as Facebook can truly be a community, and if so, exactly what type of community this might be.³⁷ Certainly, the online world is not a perfect world. At its worst, people can use the Internet to create the illusion of intimacy, while masking one's

³⁵ Richard Peace, *Small Group Evangelism: A Training Program for Reaching out with the Gospel* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 2004), 5. For suggestions on assembling ministry teams, including the relationship to spiritual gifts, see E. Stanley Ott, *Transform Your Church with Ministry Teams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 77-94. Joel Comiskey's research of seven hundred cell leaders in eight countries showed that the primary gift that was identified by cell leaders was teaching, followed by leadership and evangelism. Joel Comiskey, *Home Cell Group Explosion: How Your Small Group Can Grow and Multiply* (Houston, TX: Touch, 2002), 29. The Alpha course directors make the following suggestion: "Allocate a specific person in each group to look after the administration for their group, preferably someone who is gifted in that area." Nicky Gumbel, *How to Run an Alpha Course: The Director's Handbook* (London: Alpha International, 1997), 36. Peace also suggests appointing a small committee to attend to various details in the planning. This would fall under the gift of Administration (tasks). Richard Peace, *A Church's Guide to Evangelism* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Bookstore, 1982), 41.

³⁶ Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 37.

³⁷ "Understanding the internet as a social network requires the reexamination of the nature and definition of community." Ibid., 27.

true identity. On Facebook, services like FriendFlood can post fake, attractive “friends” on a people’s profile to make them look popular.³⁸ The collection of online friends can be an exercise in narcissism, and social networking sites can be extremely addictive.³⁹ Though studies have shown that online interaction does not replace real world interaction, the fear that this will happen still remains.⁴⁰

While the dangers of online communities are real, people are spending more and more time on social networking; therefore, to shun online communities is to fail to be both missional (go where people are) and incarnational (living as they live). Furthermore, despite the flaws of online communities, many online community participants feel that online community is authentic community. In fact, one study reports that nearly one-half of those who joined online communities “say they ‘feel as strongly’ about their virtual community as they do about their real-world communities.”⁴¹

There are several elements that are thought to be needed for an online group to generate these types of strong feelings and be considered a community. Online

³⁸ Fraser and Dutta, *Throwing Sheep in the Boardroom*, 39.

³⁹ Ibid., 41. Alternatively, Lance Ford posits that perhaps rather than narcissism, this is a symptom of loneliness. Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 89.

⁴⁰ Shane Hipps, author of *Flickering Pixels*, states that online social networking is not a neutral aid for community, and charges that online social networking “inoculates people against the desire to be *physically present* with others in real social networks—networks like a church or a meal at someone’s home.” See Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 116. Research, however, shows that, by and large, online community is not replacing real world community. Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 128. Eighty-four percent of young adults disagreed with the statement, “Online relationships can be just as fulfilling as offline ones.” Eighty percent also disagreed with the statement “You can get to know a person better on the Internet than in person.” Watkins, *The Young and the Digital*, 62. See also Farhad Manjoo, “You Have No Friends: Everyone Else Is on Facebook. Why Aren’t You?” (2009), <http://www.slate.com/id/2208678/> (accessed May 17, 2009). Manjoo asserts that Facebook actually increases the desire for face-to-face contact and leads to deeper conversations.

⁴¹ Nicholas G. Carr, *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, from Edison to Google*, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), 124. Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 129.

communities “have members, a social organization, language and patterns of interaction, and a shared culture and identity.”⁴² The communication is two way (person to person or person to group) in the group, and perhaps most importantly, the members are willing to make an emotional investment in the group. Heidi Campbell, author of *Exploring Religious Online Community*, explains that “an online group becomes a community when an online forum moves from being a platform of conversation to becoming a gathering place for a core of people who invest emotionally in the discussion and generate feelings of attachment to other members.”⁴³ In today’s world, the strongest form of online community combines both online and offline interaction.⁴⁴

If the above criterion for online community is used, then online community might be less common and, where found, more authentic than often thought. Most websites as currently constructed would automatically fail to meet this criterion, as most websites have not been interactive (though this is changing). Ironically, many church Facebook pages would fail this criterion as well, as they too have often been used merely as a broadcast medium, despite the pages’ interactive capabilities. While broadcasting can have value, it does not constitute a community. Additionally, the impersonal nature of the Facebook page, where the posts are often made by the “church name” rather than a person, makes emotional attachment somewhat difficult.

High Pointe has a Facebook page, though it has been used more as a broadcast medium than as an online community, broadcasting sermons, updates, announcements,

⁴² Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 44.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “It is the internet’s ability to provide a bridge between online and offline relationships that enables it to support community.” Ibid., 49.

and the like; however, through the use of the Facebook groups, the church has been able to form several online communities. Now, each time a *The Story of Redemption* small group study begins, a *The Story of Redemption* Facebook group is formed wherever possible to help the small group members form stronger bonds (both online and offline). These groups have helped members get to know each other's names, faces, and interests, as well as keep up with one another throughout the week. One of the best developments in these groups has been the posting of daily joys, struggles, and prayer requests, to which the groups have responded with celebration, empathy, and prayer, respectively.

Past studies have shown that online prayers and prayer requests are some of the strongest activities that draw community members towards one another.⁴⁵ This has certainly been true for the online community that has formed out of the offline *The Story of Redemption* group in Melissa; however, while this online prayer request and exchange is powerful, it should be remembered that it was the real world community in which the online participants were involved that provided the powerful emotional connection. This is why both for humanity in general and for missional outreach in particular, online community alone cannot be the end goal. A computer screen cannot give a person a hug, even with HD1080 resolution. The closest trust will come from being able to meet people in the real world, look them in the eyes, and get a sense of their true personhood.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 129-34. "Prayer, rather than Bible study, is associated with seeing love enacted in one's group." Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 265. "By associating spirituality with the group process, the group reinforces the sense that God is also a loving being." Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 287.

⁴⁶ According to one survey of young people, 68 percent disagreed that "online-only relationships are just as fulfilling as off-line relationships." Watkins, *The Young and the Digital*, 131.

Wherever possible online communities that begin online, as well as online friends who are not part of an online community, need to be invited to join into real world community. Not only is this the truest form of community, but this real world interaction is necessary for baptism and conversion.⁴⁷ Moving people from online to real world community can be accomplished in several ways. Most simply, Christians can make personal invitations online to their virtual friends to get together for coffee, conversation, Bible study, service, or worship. There are social networking applications that can directly help people online to get together and meet other online users, including people that they have never met before. Groups of local Twitter users can be invited to all meet together for a “Tweetup,” a real world gathering of Twitterers.⁴⁸ The site Meetup.com is specifically designed to use the Internet to gather people of similar interests for real world meetings.⁴⁹ These tools can be used to move people from online community to real world community, where they can be more fully shaped by the gospel as it is told and lived out by God’s people.

⁴⁷ Douglas Estes, on the other hand, advocates that there ought to be a virtual or online parallel to every real world spiritual act, including the Lord’s Supper and baptism. Estes makes a plea for the development of purely virtual or online churches and views them to be as legitimate as real world churches. Douglas Estes, *Simchurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 115-29. For a model of how community is an integral part of conversion, see Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 47-75.

⁴⁸ For ideas on how to organize a Tweetup, see Stuart Foster, “How to Organize a Successful Tweetup,” Mashable.com, <http://mashable.com/2009/02/25/tweetup/> (accessed March 16, 2011). For a useful tool on organizing Tweetups, go to the Twtvite site: “Twtvite,” 63 Squares <http://twtvite.com> (accessed March 16, 2011).

⁴⁹ Meetup.com is a site that can be used to form groups of similar interest for the purpose of meeting in person. Part of Meetup.com’s “manifesto” is “Let’s use the Internet to get people off the Internet” and “When people get together, amazing things happen.” First Heifermann and Scott Heifermann, “Meetup About Page,” <http://www.meetup.com/about/> (accessed May 21, 2009).

Serving by Healing the Brokenness of Lack of Time/Busyness

A second area of brokenness identified for suburbanites in Chapter 2 is a lack of time, or busyness. Structurally, the suburbs lend themselves towards a hectic lifestyle, though some of this busyness is self-imposed. High Pointe has attempted to be a missional church in suburbia by addressing the brokenness of busyness through providing childcare, a Celebrate Recovery ministry, and a Dynamic Marriage ministry.

Childcare

The missional church can give relief for young suburbanites' busyness by providing help in child-rearing, which can begin with something as simple as offering free babysitting. Couples and single parents rarely get a chance to "go out" without their children. Babysitters are expensive, and advance planning is required. One of the reasons parents feel such a need for "nights off" is that there is so little day-to-day help in childrearing. In ancient and pre-modern societies, the caretaking role for children was spread between parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and household servants. Today, industrialization, urbanization, and globalization encourage and often force families to move away from this extended family network to pursue employment. Families also choose to move away because of climate, health, or to purposefully distance themselves from this network. The causes are many, but the end result is that many families are isolated, with no one to provide help in watching children. Furthermore, parents find it difficult to trust anyone to watch their children.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ For the causes of this, see Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 35-36 and Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 34.

As church members get to know their neighbors and children's friends and build trust with them, they can offer to babysit their children. This can be done quite effectively on an individual family basis; however, this need not always be done alone. At High Pointe, a woman named Kari offers free babysitting nights for church members along with her husband. Kari has gifts of Administration (Tasks and Coordination), Helping, and Service, as well as Wisdom and Giving. The first three gifts all are useful in helping to organize and serve in this babysitting ministry. This service can be expanded from just being for members to making this available for unchurched family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers of members. During this time, the children from the community can begin to bond with the church members' children and with the entire group, leading to opportunities to invite people to worship or Bible study.

Celebrate Recovery

Celebrate Recovery is a faith-based, Christ-centered recovery ministry that was originally started by the Saddleback Church in California.⁵¹ This ministry is designed to help people overcome hurts, habits, and hang-ups, including food, sexual, drug and alcohol addictions, divorce, anxiety, depression, and more. There is certainly a need for this type of ministry, as twenty-six percent of support groups in the United States classify as "self-help" groups.⁵² Unlike, for instance, Alcoholics Anonymous, however, Celebrate Recovery directly calls upon Christ and his power to help participants overcome their

⁵¹ Celebrate Recovery, "Celebrate Recovery," <http://www.celebraterecovery.com.au>.

⁵² Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 65.

challenges and to recast their identity as a believer in Jesus Christ.⁵³ Certainly, this ministry would cover the brokenness of busyness and more.

At High Pointe, the Celebrate Recovery ministry was originally started by a member named Chris, who has gifts in Speaking, Mercy, Helping, Encouragement, and Evangelism. In addition, he had struggles of his own with sexual temptation and had had a family member who had struggled with addiction. His gift of Mercy helped give him a heart for this ministry, and his gift of Speaking helped inspire several in the congregation to join this ministry. Because of his gift of Evangelism, he saw the potential for this ministry to be an outreach ministry. His gift of Encouragement helped him encourage those who came to Celebrate Recovery to stay on the Christian path, and his gift of Helping allowed him to pass this ministry on to another member named James after the ministry had begun. James is a High Pointe member who had an affair, divorced his wife, remarried, and then left his second wife to go back to his first wife. He had been written off by numerous members and church leaders due to his behavior, but he has become a great leader in Celebrate Recovery. By using his gifts, he has helped lead people to faith, befriending them and going through *The Story of Redemption* with them.

One person that James helped lead to faith is a man from the McKinney area named Tim. Tim was largely unchurched prior to coming to High Pointe, though he had gone a few times to a Greek Orthodox church (he is Greek) and to a Christian church. Each time he drove by the High Pointe church building, he felt a tugging on his heart. So he checked out the church's website, and on the site he saw that High Pointe had a

⁵³ Therapists have noted that self-help groups encourage participants to form an identity and “re-story” their lives, helping to make sense of their past and more fully realize a better future. Celebrate Recovery does not deny the participants' hurts, habits, and hang-ups, but calls the participants to place their primary identity in being a believer in Jesus Christ. Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 295.

divorce ministry, which interested him as he was going through a divorce. He then decided to worship at High Pointe on Easter. He came and had a good experience, and then he went to High Pointe's first Celebrate Recovery meeting. Tim really liked it. He said that it was good to be with other people who had struggles. James also reached out to Tim, emailing him prior to the meeting and giving Tim his phone number. James introduced Tim to me outside of a meeting, and together we went through the *Story of Redemption* with Tim, which culminated in his baptism.

Dynamic Marriage

Dynamic Marriage is an eight-week marriage enrichment course put together by Family Dynamics which is based upon the book *His Needs, Her Needs* and additional biblical and marital principles.⁵⁴ The course is quite intensive, with readings, workbooks, and at least an hour of interactive homework between spouses each night. The participants come back together each week primarily to share about their experiences, creating accountability and positive modeling of a proper marital relationship.

The intimate nature of the sharing, the intensive nature of the course, and the extended hours spent together with other couples over the course of eight weeks helps enrich the marriages of the participants; however, it also provides a powerful experience of community, healing an area of brokenness that most participants do not even know that they have prior to the course. This experience can cause the unchurched participants to be open to invitations to worship or study the gospel with the Christians in the course.

⁵⁴ See Willard F. Harley, *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*, Rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2011). Also see Family Dynamics Institute, "Dynamic Marriage," <http://www.familydynamics.net/dynamicmarriage.php> (accessed April 4, 2011). This class also uses the book, Willard F. Harley, *Five Steps to Romantic Love: A Workbook for Readers of Love Busters and His Needs, Her Needs*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 2009).

At High Pointe, four of our shepherding couples were drawn to go through the Dynamic Marriage training due to their Pastoral Care/Shepherding gifts; however, these gifts can be used to not just “pastor” or “shepherd” church members, but the unchurched who attend from the community. A mailer was sent out to the community inviting them to the course (resulting in twenty responses), all of the visitor couples at the church were invited, several High Pointe couples invited their unchurched couple friends, and some High Pointe members invited their spouses who were not Christians to join them in the course. Five courses have been offered over the last two years, with more than twenty couples from the community participating. This has resulted in people like Kurt, a previously unchurched visitor at High Pointe who is married to a longtime Christian, going through the *Story of Redemption* study and being baptized into Christ.

Serving by Healing the Brokenness of Lack of Purpose/Materialism

A third area of brokenness identified for suburbanites in Chapter 2 was lack of purpose, caused by materialism. The suburban lifestyle of overconsumption promises fulfillment, but leads to emptiness and debt. The missional church in suburbia can address this area of brokenness, which at High Pointe has resulted in ministry to the poor, the Food Pantry ministry, the Clothes Closet ministry, adopting Vega Elementary School, the Habitat for Humanity ministry, and the Financial Peace University ministry.

Ministry to the Poor

In order to combat materialism, the missional church can minister to the poor. As is noted above, there are surprising amounts of poverty in suburban areas, even in those areas though to be the “Best Places to Live.” For example, Portsmouth, New Hampshire,

in Rockford County, was identified by *Money* magazine as the fifth best place to live in the United States in 2006. Yet, the Red Cross in Rockford County had nearly 7000 people visit its food pantry in 2006, up nearly sevenfold since 2000. Many of those seeking help do not have cars, and with the high price of gas and the lack of public transportation in the suburbs, it is difficult for those needing help to receive it. Many suburban areas have few organizations that provide assistance for poor families. One Red Cross worker said, "Public hospitals, nutrition assistance programs—most of these things are still overwhelmingly urban. You see small-scale operations in suburbs getting inundated. They just can't deal with the demand."⁵⁵ Ironically, though designated as the fifth best to live in the United States, McKinney is facing the same poverty challenges that Portsmouth faced, and which have been exacerbated by "The Great Recession."

By ministering to the poor in all of the above ways, suburbanites—both Christians and non-Christians—can come to grips with both how blessed they are financially as well as their own materialism. The average church member in the United States gives 2.66 percent of his or her income, and most live lives little different from the world.⁵⁶ In order to heal the world of its brokenness, the Church must itself first be shaped and made whole, and ministry to the poor provides this shaping. Furthermore, non-Christians can be invited to join in this type of ministry prior to their conversion, helping to shape their

⁵⁵ Eyal Press, "The New Suburban Poverty," *The Nation*, <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070423/press> (accessed June 3, 2007).

⁵⁶ Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 20.

hearts as well.⁵⁷ Additionally, ministry to the poor is seen as a mark of authenticity by the unchurched, and this service can help overcome the skeptical and cynical attitudes that many have towards churches. Some of the ministries that have developed at High Pointe to minister to the poor are detailed below.

Food Pantry

At the beginning of 2008, the High Pointe food pantry ministry did not really exist. At that time, only a few families came in each week from the community asking for food; however, as the economy continued to decline through “The Great Recession,” more and more people came seeking help with basic physical needs, including food.⁵⁸ As this occurred, Linda, one of the church secretaries, went through a spiritual gifts assessment and discovered that she had gifts in Faith, Mercy, Encouragement, Teaching, and Prayer. She saw that she could use her gifts to respond to this growing need for food in the community. Out of these gifts the High Pointe food pantry ministry was born.

⁵⁷ Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good and Good Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 173-74.

⁵⁸ “The Great Recession,” which began in December 2007 and officially ended in June 2009, is agreed by economists to be the worst economic downturn since The Great Depression. Chris Isidore, “The Great Recession,” http://money.cnn.com/2009/03/25/news/economy/depression_comparisons/ (accessed April 4, 2011). Neil Irwin, “It’s Official: The Great Recession Ended Last Summer” http://voices.washingtonpost.com/political-economy/2010/09/its_official_the_great_recessi.html (accessed April 4, 2011). Average household net worth shrunk 20 percent, more than half of Americans reported some type of “workplace hardship”—period of unemployment, a pay cut, a reduction in work hours or an involuntary move to part-time employment—and long term unemployment rose to its highest level since the 1940s. Judith Warner, “What the Great Recession Has Done to Family Life,” <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/08/magazine/08FOB-wwln-t.html> (accessed April 4, 2011). While the recession officially ended in June 2009, there was a jobless recovery. Unemployment, which rose as high as 10.1 percent, still stood at 8.8 percent in April of 2011. David Rosnick, “Unemployment Has Topped 10.5 Percent for 18 Months,” <http://www.cepr.net/index.php/blogs/cepr-blog/unemployment-has-topped-105-percent-for-18-months> (accessed April 4, 2011). The unemployment rate was projected to stay above 8 percent through 2012. Matt Cover, “Cbo: Unemployment Will Stay above 8 Percent until 2012,” <http://www.cnsnews.com/node/75535> (accessed April 4, 2011).

Linda's gift of Mercy causes her to have a heart for those who come in with needs, whether they are the longtime homeless or typical suburbanites who have lost their jobs and cannot afford food for the first time. She uses her gift of Prayer to pray for those who come in "in the moment," and she makes prayer lists of these people's needs and publishes them to the congregation. Many who later find jobs and no longer need food still come in each week to seek her out and receive prayer. Through her gifts of Faith and Encouragement, Linda is able to provide hope to the food pantry customers (Linda's affectionate name for those who receive food), telling them that God will provide for them. She uses her gift of Teaching in many "teachable moments," and also plans to teach a *The Story of Redemption* Bible study in the hour before the food pantry opens. She now publishes little stories about the food pantry ministry each week in the bulletin, and the children's ministry, youth ministry, families, and the congregation as a whole have all been touched and inspired to donate food towards this ministry. The food pantry ministry now helps an average of three thousand families each year.

Clothes Closet

The High Pointe Clothes Closet ministry has had a long history; however, this was a ministry that had operated with little awareness amongst the congregation and was not seen as being vital to the church's mission. In addition, in recent years, many of the workers had aged and had not been replaced; however, as the need for this ministry began to be raised in the bulletin and on the Missional Outreach Network, those who had a heart for this ministry began to surface.

Dalana is a High Pointe member who was added as a part-time staff member to run the clothes closet after going through a Spiritual gifts assessment. Her gifts include Faith, Administration (Tasks), Discernment, Wisdom, and Prayer. Dalana uses her Administration (Tasks) gift to perform the many organizational tasks associated with the clothes closet ministry, and she uses her gifts of Faith and Wisdom to provide hope for the clothes closet customers, much as Linda above. Her gift of Discernment is used in helping to determine which customers have genuine needs that go above and beyond the norm. She posts a weekly update in the bulletin and on the Missional Outreach Network, using her Prayer gift to identify prayer needs, and raising awareness of this ministry.

The impact upon the community from this ministry, as well as that of the food pantry, has been tremendous. More than five thousand people are now helped with this ministry each year. The schools in McKinney now know to send families who do not have clothes to High Pointe. There has also been a close linking of this ministry to High Pointe's Hispanic church plant, as the vast majority of clothes closet customers are Hispanic. Carlos Lopez, High Pointe's Hispanic church planter, conducts a weekly Bible study in the thirty minutes before the clothes closet opens. Though his church plant is located ten to fifteen miles away in Plano, Texas, many from his congregation have come to serve in the clothes closet. Some of these, such as Guilla, served in the clothes closet even before being baptized. Another woman reached through this ministry is Ruby. She and her husband had taken care of the church's lawn, but he was shot in Arlington, Texas, in a drive-by shooting. Workers from the clothes closet introduced Ruby to Carlos, and she and her family were baptized. Carlos is currently making plans to form an entirely new church plant in McKinney partly out of the clothes closet ministry.

Adopting Vega Elementary School

Missional leader and author Reggie McNeal encourages every church to adopt a local primary or secondary school to be both a servant to the community.⁵⁹ In addition, this adoption allows the church to be in touch with the needs of the community, for virtually every major need that exists in a community will be manifest and known in the local public schools. Despite the separation of church and state, many public schools, desperate for help, are welcoming churches that truly want to serve in the schools.

In McKinney there is a non-profit named 3e McKinney which helps facilitate partnerships between churches and schools, and they helped High Pointe adopt Vega elementary. High Pointe was a natural candidate to adopt a school for many reasons. First, High Pointe already has strong food pantry and clothes closet ministries and a history of providing gifts to needy children at Thanksgiving and Christmas time. Second, Vega elementary is only a few blocks away from the High Pointe building, and it is a school with high needs and many disadvantaged children. Third, the new High Pointe children's minister, Dana, has a heart for this type of outreach to children.

Dana has gifts of Hospitality, Leadership, Administration (Coordination of People and Projects), Faith, and Encouragement. Through her gifts of Leadership and Hospitality, she took the initiative to meet and welcome the principal and key staff at Vega Elementary School and begin this partnership. Her Administration gift helped her work with the staff, ministry leaders, and members at High Pointe that were needed to begin to direct the High Pointe food pantry, clothes closet, and Thanksgiving and Christmas outreaches to Vega Elementary families. Her gift of Encouragement has

⁵⁹ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 53.

helped her keep the workers in these ministries going strong, and her gift of Faith has helped these workers see how God is at work through this ministry.

The impact upon the community from adopting Vega Elementary is growing each year. The principal and staff at the school have grown in their trust of High Pointe, with the principal even coming and serving with the church at the High Pointe building during a Christmas gift giveaway for Vega Elementary School children. The school has highlighted this partnership in its printed material that is sent home to parents, causing numerous families in the community to become aware of High Pointe for the first time. One of these families is Lindsey, who received a flyer from the school from her six-year-old daughter Averi that had information about High Pointe Church of Christ on it. Lindsey looked up the church's website, noticed that the church was only a few blocks from her house, and came and worshipped at High Pointe. From there, she was invited to be a part of a *The Story of Redemption* study, resulting in her being baptized.

Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit, ecumenical ministry which seeks to provide affordable housing to needy recipients by partnering with businesses, churches, and individuals who donate labor, money, and building materials.⁶⁰ High Pointe has sponsored Habitat for Humanity homes at various times in its history, but in recent years, this ministry had fallen dormant. Trent and Amanda, a young married couple at High Pointe, both went through a spiritual gifts assessment and discovered that they both had gifts of Service. Through this process they discovered that they would like to revive the

⁶⁰ Habitat for Humanity, "Home page," <http://www/habitat.org> (accessed April 4, 2011).

Habitat for Humanity ministry, as they both enjoy working with their hands and building.

Trent has gifts of Helping, Encouragement, Service, Hospitality, and Faith. He has used his Hospitality, Encouragement, and Helping gifts to welcome the workers and home recipients on the work site and to provide assistance to them in any way that is needed. His gift of Faith has helped him to see how God is at work in this ministry, leading him to seek to connect the home recipients to God.

Financial Peace University

In addition to ministry to the poor, the missional church can help combat the problems of materialism by teaching directly about proper attitudes towards money, debt, finances, and material things. One ministry that can help address the problem of materialism is the church-based version of Financial Peace University (FPU).⁶¹ Financial Peace University is a thirteen week financial management course developed by Dave Ramsey that seeks to help the course participants pay off debt, develop better financial management skills, and learn biblical principles about money. Ramsey offers tough advice, telling his audience to cut up credit cards, to live simply, and to give generously.

Financial Peace University is a great outreach for several reasons. First, there is a great felt need to better deal with finances in today's consumer culture. The stress of debt and huge mortgages in the United States is tremendous, affecting marriages, health, and devotion towards God.⁶² Many families have been permanently affected by "The Great

⁶¹ Dave Ramsey, "Financial Peace University Church Curriculum," <http://www.daveramsey.com/church/home/> (April 4, 2011).

⁶² The average credit card balance of those in the US who have credit card debt as of 2011 was \$14,750. Total consumer debt for all Americans was \$2.4 trillion as of June 2010. Ben Woolsey and Matt Schulz, "Credit Card Statistics, Industry Facts, Debt Statistics" <http://www.creditcards.com/credit-card->

Recession,” and are seeking to downsize and be less materialistic.⁶³ FPU gives families tools to do this. Second, Dave Ramsey is a nationally known figure with significant name recognition. Third, when a church signs up to host FPU, Dave Ramsey’s website will direct people from the community to the course. Fourth, because the course participants meet for thirteen weeks in a small group format, community formation occurs and relationships can develop that lead people to further explore worship or Bible study.

James is a High Pointe member who, through Dave Ramsey’s ministry, was able to get his finances back in order. He is passionate about helping people get out of debt and has started the Financial Peace University ministry at High Pointe.⁶⁴ Hundreds of members have gone through FPU at High Pointe, including a number of families from the community. One of the families reached through this ministry is Corey, Haley, and Haley’s teenage daughter, Tyler. They attended FPU and then were invited to come to worship at High Pointe. They came, received further invitations to things such as the men’s paintball retreat, and eventually went through a *The Story of Redemption* small group study. Both Haley and her daughter Tyler were baptized.

news/credit-card-industry-facts-personal-debt-statistics-1276.php (accessed April 8, 2011). “After drugs and crime, people see materialism as the most serious problem affecting American families.” Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999).

⁶³ Warner, “What the Great Recession Has Done to Family Life.”

⁶⁴ While James has not gone through a formal spiritual gifts assessment, he clearly demonstrates gifts in Speaking, Teaching, and Pastoral Care/Shepherding. He has been able to use these gifts in this ministry. There are numerous speaking opportunities in FPU, as the class size has at times been over one hundred people. The small group portion of the class contains teaching on financial and biblical principles, and the sharing that happens there brings about opportunities for shepherding and one-on-one counseling, which he does extensively with many who come through the classes.

CHAPTER 7

A MISSIONAL OUTREACH STRATEGY FOR SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent” (Lk 4:43). Once the Church seeks out and serves people, following Jesus’ example, she must offer salvation by sharing the good news of Jesus and the kingdom of God to those who have been sought and served. Hirsch says that we must “be always willing to share the gospel story with those within our world. We simply cannot take this aspect out of the equation of mission and remain faithful to our calling in the world. We are essentially a message tribe, and that means we must ensure the faithful transmission of the message we carry through proclamation.”¹ “Sharing the good news” is indeed an essential part of mission and any missional outreach strategy. In order to fulfill Christ’s mission, the Church must share the good news and ought to do so in a way (both form and content) that will resonate in the hearers of the gospel. In contrast to the individualistic and linear gospel “presentations” of

¹ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 133-34. Ironically, however, Hirsch gives virtually no examples of how this message is to be shared. There is an assumption that if a person is incarnational and in proximity to non-Christians that the message will automatically be shared. The very fact Hirsch feels it necessary to say that the verbal proclamation of the good news cannot be taken out of mission shows the tendency of some within the missional movement to downplay “evangelism.” I first began to write on sharing the good news to a postmodern culture using *The Story of Redemption* in 2010. See James Nored, “Sharing the Story of Redemption in a Postmodern Context” (a paper written for the course, “OD792-0: Independent Study: Organizational Development,” Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010).

modernism, in today's postmodern culture, the gospel must primarily be shared in a narrative, holistic, and communal form.² This chapter explains the postmodern condition and presents an evangelistic Bible study called *The Story of Redemption*, which is designed to share the good news and lead postmoderns to faith in Christ and conversion.

Sharing the Good News as a Metanarrative in a Postmodern World

In 1979, Francois Lyotard wrote *The Postmodern Condition*, in which he recognized this seismic change that was sweeping across culture and philosophy. The postmodern condition “pertains to one’s awareness of the deconstructibility of all systems of meaning and truth.”³ Postmodernism is a condition, not a singular definition, for every system of meaning/truth is deconstructed, resulting in many postmodernisms. This postmodern condition is at times called “postmodernity.” Postmodernity is “the condition of being so exposed to plurality and otherness that one becomes conscious of the contingency of one’s own language, culture, and way of life.”⁴ The pluralism of postmodernism leads to resistance of any overarching system of truth/meaning, which Lyotard famously calls the “death of the metanarrative.”⁵

² At Pentecost, Peter was surrounded by a community. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig, *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context*, American Society of Missiology Series No. 34 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 26-27. See also Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 136.

³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴ Vanhoozer, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, 77. Alternatively, some authors define postmodernism as a worldview, and postmodernity as a historical era. Heath White, *Postmodernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 11.

⁵ Metanarratives have been oppressive, and postmoderns advocate replacing metanarratives with local narratives whose tellers are respectful of others’ perspective. Postmoderns see the attempt to tell one story as violent exercise of power in which the voices of minority viewpoints are silenced.

The death of the metanarrative would seem to present a major challenge to Christianity, for the Christian story makes claims for all peoples at all times; however, James A. K. Smith points out that Lyotard defines metanarratives not as grand stories, but as specifically modern stories that seek to legitimate themselves through the appeal to universal reason. While most Christians would not see their faith as unreasonable or illogical, the Christian story “does not—at least within a broadly conceived ‘Augustinian’ tradition—claim to be legitimated by Reason, but rather trusted in faith.”⁶

Thus, not only is a modern presentation of the gospel passé, but it potentially distorts the Christian story. Furthermore, the biblical story is made up of many local narratives which resist the totalizing tendency of modernism, giving voice in these local narratives to those with whom postmoderns are usually concerned—the oppressed, the poor, slaves, women, the marginalized, and minorities.⁷ A thoroughly postmodern version of the Christian story, however, would reduce the gospel to but one story among many, “violating” its universal claims. Robert Webber rightly advocates a middle position that the Christian faith should be an expression of historic Christianity for the current era.⁸ This presentation should emphasize postmodern concerns, questions, and values, while addressing modern issues that are still pertinent for today.

⁶ Myron B. Penner, *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 125. See also James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, *The Church and Postmodern Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 68.

⁷ J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 83-91.

⁸ Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 23-38. For a critique of Christian accommodation of postmodernism, see Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004). Millard Erickson's “postpostmodernism” has some parallels to Webber's approach; however, his analysis of

Though the Christian story is not modern or postmodern, it is indeed a metanarrative, or grand story, albeit of a different kind—a metanarrative of faith.⁹ I have called this grand story *The Story of Redemption*, which is also the title of an eight-week evangelistic Bible study that I have written.¹⁰ This paper will attempt to briefly summarize this story as presented in this study and show how the presentation and the themes found within it share historic Christianity with our largely postmodern culture in such a way to bring people to saving faith in Jesus Christ.¹¹

The Narrative of the Story of Redemption

The Story of Redemption is largely narrative in form, which is appropriate for many reasons.¹² Humans are storytellers, and they make sense of their lives through

postmodernism is much more negative than positive. Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 306-28. For an embrace of postmodernism by “postconservatives” see Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*.

⁹ For a discussion of the Christian story as a metanarrative, see Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 273-88.

¹⁰ James Nored, *The Story of Redemption*, 2nd ed. (McKinney, TX: PrintRight, 2010).

¹¹ Note that, true to postmodern form, the theology of this paper has largely been embedded in the narrative.

¹² *The Story of Redemption*, while primarily narrative, is not devoid of a few rational explanations. Phillips and Okholm advocate a narrative approach to apologetics; however, they point out, that even “narrative purists and deconstructionists” use rationality to explain their positions. They therefore conclude “we need not shy away from some appeal to classical apologetics as long as it is buttressed by other modes of discourse and defense.” Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 188-89. For instance, the first part of *The Story of Redemption* contains some reasoning about the ultimate origins of the universe. This is included in part because of the “New Aggressive Atheism” of Richard Dawkins and others, and in part due to my own science background; however, it is only a small part in the overall narrative. See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2008).

narrative.¹³ Most of Scripture is narrative, and the Christian faith was presented in this form through much of the history of Christianity. Early Christians shared the gospel story orally, and the medieval church kept an emphasis upon narrative by telling these stories in art form. The Enlightenment, the issues involved in the Reformation (such as grace versus works), and the invention of the printing press pushed Christian thinkers and writers into an emphasis upon Paul and his presentation of the gospel, which is mainly non-narrative in form, for centuries. In contrast, postmoderns resist appeals to universal reason, and are moved more by emotion, image, and personal testimony—elements made much more possible in narrative than syllogisms.¹⁴ The current interest in story is also a phenomenon intensified through the invention of pervasive new media that is often used for storytelling, such as television and video;¹⁵ however, human beings seem to by their very nature use narrative to interpret their past and guide their ongoing behavior and morality. Therefore, when people hear biblical stories, they compare their own lives to these stories and use them to pull together their fragmented selves and form a new narrative for their lives.¹⁶

For these reasons, *The Story of Redemption* does not begin by seeking to prove the authority of the Bible, which would be resisted by postmoderns. Instead, the narrative

¹³ Ray Lubeck and Theological Research Exchange Network, "Talking Story Narrative Thought, Worldviews, and Postmodernism," in *Evangelical Theological Society papers ETS-5020* (1998), <http://proxy.fuller.edu:2048/login?url=http://libraryweb.fuller.edu/tren/ETS-5020.pdf>.

¹⁴ Carl A. Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 17. For a critique of postmodern views of truth, and an affirmation of the correspondence view of truth, see Erickson, Helseth, and Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center*, 59-79.

¹⁵ Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2006), 81, 117.

¹⁶ Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 293-95.

begins in Genesis, inviting seekers to listen and interact with the story, suspending disbelief and seeing if the story “rings true.”¹⁷ A narrative will be “compelling if it represents *a world*, or part of a world, in a way that supports imaginative entrance into that world, irrespective of how things actually are.”¹⁸ By inviting seekers to enter into the world of Scripture, even if they are skeptical or disbelieving, a pathway for discovering God and his story is opened.

Creation

The Story of Redemption, as with the biblical account, begins with God and creation. Certainly a case could be made that Jesus ought to be the starting point for sharing faith, and he is indeed for many people. Jesus is well known, respected even by non-Christians, and of course, the center of Christianity. There are, however, several reasons to begin with God and creation. First, starting with God, rather than, Jesus, establishes more common ground, as more Americans believe in God than believe in the divinity of Christ.¹⁹ Second, many postmoderns have personally experienced tremendous pain and brokenness from divorce, abuse, loneliness, and addiction, and they wonder who they are, who God is, and why God has allowed these things to happen to them. The

¹⁷ “The issue in a postmodern world is not to prove the Bible, but to restore the message of the Bible, a message which, when proclaimed by the power of the Spirit, takes up residence within those who know how to hear.” Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*, 46. A work of art, if true, will be self-authenticating. See John Thornhill, *Modernity: Christianity's Estranged Child Reconstructed* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 120-21.

¹⁸ Penner, *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, 39.

¹⁹ David Masci, “Scientists and Beliefs,” *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=474> (accessed November 16, 2009). See also “Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians over the Past 13 Years” (2009), <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years> (accessed November 16, 2009).

study opens with these basic questions, which are addressed in Genesis, helping people to place trusting faith in God.²⁰ Third, the creation story, properly told, has such explanatory power that it often opens the hearers up to the rest of the biblical story.

The biblical account assumes God, and it reveals much about both God and humanity. God is the creator God, and there is a distinctive pattern in his creation. The land and the seas, the plants and the trees, the sun and the moon, the creatures of the sea and the birds, and the animals are all created “good.” When God creates humanity, this is “very good.” While not divine, humanity—male and female together—is made in the image of God. Adam and Eve are given dominion over all the earth. Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden and given meaningful work, and God creates Eve out of his side. They are naked without shame, and God walks and talks amongst them.

There is much significance to humanity being created in the “image of God.” Moderns have tended to see “image of God” in anthropocentric terms, emphasizing humanity’s rationality and superiority to the animals; however, postmodern theologian Scott McKnight sees “image of God” as referring to humanity’s godlikeness. In the narrative of Genesis 1-2, “God creates, God rules, God speaks, God names, God orders, God establishes variety and beauty. God makes a ducky little garden for humans, God makes a partner for Adam in Eve, God rests, and God obligates humans to himself through word and promise God’s obligations are instructions, like the ones we get in presents, for Eikons [images] on how Eikons best work.”²¹ Humans made in God’s image

²⁰ The basic questions humans ask to determine their narrative are: 1) Where are we? 2) Who are we? 3) What’s wrong? and 4) What’s the remedy? See Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 11.

²¹ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 20-22.

“best work” when they live in relationship with one another and with God, and when they fulfill their destiny to together rule over creation. This is their “missional” charge.

Thus, the creation account presents a picture of perfect community between God and humanity—emphasizing the goodness of both—who are partnering together in mission. Narrating or reading this account invokes the imagination and allows the hearers to enter into a world which is incredibly appealing. The longing for community in postmodern culture has often been noted, with postmodern theologian Stanley Grenz even making community his theological organizing principle.²² The implication of the text that God creates humanity out of love—showering them with gifts—can help postmoderns see God in a positive light.²³ The desire for purpose and meaning amongst Boomers, popularized by books such as *The Purpose-Driven Life*, has been broadened amongst younger generations to include global concerns such as AIDS in Africa, world hunger, and proper care of the environment.²⁴ The appeal of a good world, very good humanity, and a loving God should not be underestimated.²⁵ The hearers are asked to compare the peace, beauty, and harmony found in the Garden to the world today. Obviously, there is no comparison, which begs the obvious question—what happened?

²² Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

²³ Chrysostom saw creation in all of its goodness as an environment created by God to help humanity see God’s love and to grow in love towards God. See Thomas C. Oden, Kenneth Tanner, and Christopher A. Hall, *Ancient & Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of Thomas C. Oden* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 33. One recent study has shown that those who have view God as good and active in the world are much more likely to be religiously active. See Rodney Stark, *What Americans Really Believe: New Findings from the Baylor Surveys of Religion* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 78.

²⁴ Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life*.

²⁵ The problem with many gospel presentations is that they have tended to start with Genesis 3 (sin and a fallen world) rather than Genesis 1-2 (image of God and a good world).

God tells Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit that was found in the middle of the Garden. Satan, however, tempts Adam and Eve, and they partake of the forbidden fruit, asserting their independence from him. This failure to trust God is defined as sin in *The Story of Redemption*. The postmodern world either fails to understand sin, or it overwhelmingly sees sin only as the breaking of a legal code, which leads to judgment. By defining sin as a failure to trust God, sin is cast in terms of a relationship that has been shattered—something with which postmoderns can identify. Brokenness in relationships with God leads to brokenness in human relationships, with attempts to oppress others.²⁶ Sin may also lead humans to debase themselves, failing to create, rule, order, or beautify. Thus, sin can ultimately be defined as failure by humans to live as the “image of God.”²⁷

The result of this failure to live as the image of God is seen in the creation story. Adam and Eve hide from God after sinning, making clothes out of fig leaves in a vain attempt to cover themselves in their loss of innocence. As God deals out punishment, Adam turns on Eve. Their relationship is strained, and pain increases in childbearing. The ground itself is cursed, making humanity’s rule over creation difficult. This curse of the ground is symbolic of the overall randomness, chaos, and suffering that entered into the world through sin, exhibited in earthquakes, tornadoes, disease, and death.²⁸

The ultimate sign of Adam’s and Eve’s severance from God and fall from their intended role as co-rulers with him is that they are cast out of the garden. Yet within this

²⁶ Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 124.

²⁷ McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 23.

²⁸ Suffering was once thought of as the result of evil. In postmodern thought, suffering *is* evil. Jennifer L. Geddes, ed., *Evil after Postmodernism: Histories, Narratives, and Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 60.

story are two signs of love, hope, and grace. First, God makes clothes for Adam and Eve, helping them cover the shame that sin brings and providing them with protection. Second, there is embedded in the punishment given to the serpent a prophecy about a descendant of the woman who would crush the serpent's head, even as he strikes his heel. This prophecy is the first prophecy about Christ, the son of God, whom God would bring into the world to die on a cross for humanity's sin and bring about redemption.

Redemption is often used to refer to the overall saving work of Christ to free humanity from sin, and it is this overall work that *The Story of Redemption* seeks to share. There are, however, particular aspects of the atonement that are emphasized in this telling of the story to connect with postmoderns—ransom/liberation/*Cristus Victor*, reconciliation, and restoration.²⁹ The word “redemption” in the title shows a strong emphasis upon the ransom or liberation theory of atonement, due to the close etymological relationship of redemption and ransom. At times this view of atonement is equated with *Cristus Victor*, the idea that Christ has conquered sin, death, and the evil powers.³⁰ Liberation from the destructive nature of sin upon their lives and the world is a concept that resonates with postmoderns, who have experienced this destruction

²⁹ Certain theories of atonement are also less emphasized in the story, including substitutionary atonement, moral influence theory, and the satisfaction theory. Penal substitution—often poorly or improperly explained by Christians—is rejected by many postmoderns, who view penal substitution as child abuse and the sanctioning of violence. McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 39-43. Postmoderns have an overall lower sensitivity to morality than those in the recent past, making the moral influence theory less appealing than it was under the optimistic progressivism of modernism. The satisfaction theory, popular during feudal times, makes little sense in a postmodern society not built upon shame and honor. These other aspects of the atonement are still useful, but can be inferred, experienced, or explained as the narrative unfolds. For an analysis of how different atonement theories fit different cultures, see Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000). Brian McLaren, through a fictional narrative, illustrates how postmoderns might react to different atonement theories. No theory is fully satisfactory. See Brian D. McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian*, *The New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 102-06.

³⁰ Richardson, *Evangelism Outside the Box*, 24.

firsthand. Reconciliation and restoration, if expressed relationally in terms of restored community with God, humanity, and creation, are also concepts that appeal to postmoderns due to the brokenness in their relationships, spiritual hunger, and concern for the environment.³¹

Finally, if humanity is redeemed from sin and its destructive effects, what is humanity redeemed for? Humanity is redeemed to fully be what God intended for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden—a loving community in fellowship with God, one another, and creation, partnering with God through Christ and the Spirit in his mission of bringing about a people and world where God’s will is done. This redemption is accomplished not just through Christ’s atoning death, but through his atoning birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and continuing work through the Spirit (Phil 2:5-8).³² This is *The Story of Redemption*.

The God of Grace

One fundamental concept that a person must understand to receive salvation is grace. Grace is, however, is not a term often used amongst non-Christians, nor is it a familiar concept or practice. While there might be an attempt by an evangelist to use some alternative wording, drawing upon a cultural parallel, such analogies would not do the concept justice. Furthermore, while translation of the gospel into indigenous language

³¹ M.A. Srokosz, "God’s Story and the Earth’s Story: Grounding Our Concern for the Environment in the Biblical Metanarrative," *Science and Christian Belief* 20 (2008). Note that atonement theories are classified in different ways by different theologians. For a work and classification that highlights the theme of restoration, see Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

³² McKnight says that “eternity is the *society* created by God around Jesus Christ wherein God’s people enjoy union with God and communion with one another, in a place where everything works as it did in Eden.” McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 27, 60.

is entirely proper and necessary, the hearers of the message need to eventually learn a new spiritual language—the language of Scripture.³³ Postmodern thinkers have long been concerned with language, pointing out that language is not neutral, but has incredible power to shape thinking. In fact, George Lindbeck contends that “it is necessary to have the means for expressing an experience in order to have it.” Brad Kallenberg concludes from Lindbeck’s work that “only those who are fluent in the use of terms and phrases such as *grace* and *answers to prayer* can see a set of circumstances as an answer to prayer rather than as a remarkable coincidence.”³⁴ How, then, does one gain an understanding of concepts such as grace? This understanding is gained by hearing the stories of grace in Christian community, by experiencing and practicing grace, and by learning biblical stories of grace.³⁵

Though the term is used only once (Gn 6:8), grace is found throughout Genesis 1-11. With Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his world, and the people of Babel, there is a pattern of sin, punishment, and grace. Adam and Eve fail to trust God and are punished, and yet God gives them clothes. Cain kills his brother Abel, and God places a curse upon Cain so that crops will no longer come up for him. Yet when Cain cries out that his punishment is too much, God places a mark on his forehead protecting him. Noah’s world becomes evil, and God destroys the world through the flood; however, God spares Noah and his family by having Noah build an ark. God also places a rainbow in the sky as a promise not to destroy the world again by water. The world is repopulated,

³³ The translation of the gospel into other languages and cultures, however, can release fresh new understandings of the atonement.

³⁴ Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 40-41.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

and yet the people sin by disobeying God's command to spread out and subdue the earth. In their pride, they try to build a tower that reaches heaven. In response, God "comes down" and confuses their languages, giving them the name "Babel" (confusion).³⁶

By the end of Genesis 11, it is clear that though God continues to start over with humanity, the results are the same. Something must change in order for the cycle of sin, punishment, and grace to be broken. And the story of the people of Babel ends without any visible sign of grace. Where is the grace to be found after Babel? What will break the cycle? The answer is found in the next chapter, Genesis 12, and the story of Abraham.

Faith and the Promise to Abraham

While postmodernism is often considered the enemy of Christianity, postmodernism and postmoderns are very much open to faith. Martin Heidegger, a forerunner of postmodernism, rejected the pathway of truth discovery in Western philosophy of ontology, induction, logic, proposition, and correspondence theory. Instead, he emphasized the pre-Socratic method of truth discovery, that truth is thought (not reasoned) and revealed. Furthermore, the syntax of language does not correspond exactly to "being," but only gives a glimpse of the actual being. Derrida built on Heidegger's theory, denying that language has any meaning outside of the text. Every text can be "deconstructed." In fact, "justice" is the only thing not to be deconstructed,

³⁶ The confusion caused by multiple languages reflects the postmodern emphasis upon language, in which endless meanings are created through the act of reading and writing. As in the Babel story, there is no one, unambiguous language or meaning in postmodernism, and those who think they have achieved this have arrogantly overstepped their bounds and taken the place of God. The comparison of the Tower of Babel to both modernism and postmodernism began with Derrida and has continued with Middleton and Walsh as well as Crystal Downing. See Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 15-17. Also see Crystal Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith: Questioning Truth in Language, Philosophy and Art* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 161-62.

and yet justice is not achievable in the present condition. While this could and often does lead to cynicism and despair, it also opens up the possibility of faith in an alternative world and future that cannot yet be seen. “*Faith*, not reason . . . is thus endemic to the postmodern condition.”³⁷

The story of Abraham is “ideal” for helping postmoderns understand faith. Not only is Abraham the “father of three religions”—a good starting point in a pluralistic world—he is called the “father of faith.” God calls Abraham to leave his father, family, and country behind, with no revelation as to where he is going. He makes a covenant or promise with him that he will bless Abraham, and that all nations would be blessed by him. Abraham takes a profound step of faith and follows God.

Abraham presents a picture of faith that is at odds with modern notions of absolute certainty and near perfection, which is precisely what makes his story so appealing to postmoderns. Abraham makes many mistakes and is filled with questions, impatience, and doubts.³⁸ When God appears to him twenty-four years after the initial promise and says that he will make him the father of many nations, he actually laughs. Yet through this all, God patiently affirms the promise, and he finally begins to deliver the promise through the birth of Isaac.

³⁷ Vanhoozer, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, 18. In fact, despite charges of relativism, postmodernism, unlike modernism, is predisposed towards the Reformation (and biblical) idea that God, and thus faith, is at work through the text of Scripture. Raschke, *The Next Reformation*, 115-43.

³⁸ McLaren contrasts doubting one’s faith with doubting God. The former can lead one to seek out and depend upon God. See Brian D. McLaren, *A Search for What Is Real: Finding Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 72-76.

Through this story of Abraham, postmoderns can see their own life stories and begin to recast them as journeys of faith.³⁹ The questions that so many have about God due to the brokenness of divorce, abuse, or cancer are then seen not as signs of unbelief, but as signs that they have been seeking God. This realization has a powerful effect, bringing meaning to what are often chaotic and disjointed lives.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the idea that people of faith have real questions and sometimes make mistakes is appealing on many levels. Not only does this strike postmoderns as being authentic—a key value for postmoderns—but it also helps them to see that they can be people of faith too. The story of Abraham also provides a link to Jesus and the New Testament. The gospel of Matthew—which *The Story of Redemption* follows—opens with a genealogy of Jesus, showing how Jesus is the descendant of Abraham and the child of the promise.⁴¹

Jesus' Birth, Life, and Ministry

After giving Jesus' genealogy, Matthew's gospel tells the story of Christ's birth. When Mary and Joseph are engaged, Mary becomes pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Joseph decides to divorce Mary when an angel appears and tells him how Mary became

³⁹ "Faith needs a story to sustain it." Annette Simmons, *The Story Factor: Secrets of Influence from the Art of Storytelling* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 3.

⁴⁰ "Human beings are storytellers who seek to find narratives to make sense of their own lives and the saga of human history." Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, 188. "Relating oneself to Christ, even in the disjointed course of social uprooting and cultural context, yields an experience of the self's integrity." Robert Neelly Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life: Updated Edition with a New Introduction* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 195.

⁴¹ *The Story of Redemption* passes over the story of Israel and the Exodus due to the time limits of an eight week study. Some justification of this omission is possible from Galatians 3, where Paul asserts that the promise to God's people comes through Abraham. For an alternative emphasis, see Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 87-107. Middleton and Walsh make the Exodus central to the Christian metanarrative, emphasizing the themes of radical suffering and marginalization found in this event. Jesus' story, however, recapitulates and intensifies Israel's story.

pregnant. The names of the promised child are instructive. As the child of Mary, Jesus is human, but as the names “Jesus” and “Immanuel” imply, he is also God and Savior. With the introduction of Jesus and the Spirit in the narrative, this makes a good time to discuss Jesus’ nature and the Trinitarian concept of God.⁴² Lesslie Newbigin says that when one goes outside of a Christendom context, the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be assumed, it must be the starting point when explaining who Jesus is.⁴³ As Christendom continues to fall in the United States, faiths that do not have a Trinitarian understanding of God—such as Mormonism, Islam, and Wicca—continue to grow.⁴⁴ Thus, the need for explicit teaching on concepts like the Trinity will grow as well; however, the narrative still needs to be primary, as it is the biblical story that gives meaning to theological propositions.

The gospel of Matthew emphasizes the themes of Jesus as king and the kingdom of God, beginning in the birth narrative with the magi. Many years later, John the Baptist begins to preach about repentance and the kingdom of (the) heaven(s), or kingdom of God, which is “near” or at hand. This kingdom marks the dawning of a “new age” of peace, joy and righteousness in the Holy Spirit that would be brought about by the Messiah, who would exhibit this kingdom through his life, healings, and message. As an

⁴² It could be asked whether such theological formulations are necessary. Not only is an explicit Trinitarian formulation not found in the story (or the rest of Scripture), but postmodernism has caused the entire field of systematic theology to be questioned. Indeed, Carl Rashke, who introduced the expression “the end of theology,” says that “a genuine systematic theology forged from the Bible is impossible.” Furthermore, theology is not necessarily needed to support faith, and the view that it is needed comes from Hellenistic (pagan) and modern notions. This would seem to go too far, as New Testament writers and faith communities have certainly “theologized.” See Rashke, *The Next Reformation*, 210-11. Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 222.

⁴³ Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1988), 35.

⁴⁴ According to the authors of *Generation Hex*, Wicca is the fastest growing religion in the United States. See Dillon Burroughs and Marla Alupoice, *Generation Hex: Understanding the Subtle Dangers of Wicca* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008).

oppressed people, Israel was looking for an earthly king who would come and cast out the Romans. God had in mind a different type of king, who would rule in people's hearts. Still, many people respond to John's message and are baptized. The Pharisees and Sadducees, however, do not. John warns them to produce fruit in keeping with repentance and not to rely upon their physical descent from Abraham. The hearers of *The Story of Redemption*, having learned the story of Abraham, can understand that those who are the true descendants of Abraham are those who have faith like him.

Jesus comes to John and is baptized to "fulfill all righteousness"—showing a willingness to accept God's mission for his life, and receiving the Spirit to empower him in his ministry. Christ's baptism provides a foreshadowing of the hearer's own baptism, as Jesus is the pattern and example in all things of how to live and submit to God's reign. Upon receiving the Spirit, Jesus is led into the desert to face temptation by the devil. It is at this point in the narrative that the subject of spiritual disciplines can naturally be introduced.⁴⁵ Jesus resisted the devil's temptations by quoting Scripture, after having fasted in solitude for forty days. Rather than weakening him, these practices strengthened him for the spiritual battle with Satan. These disciplines would be exercised often by Jesus, and each time they gave him renewed strength for his mission.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Spiritual disciplines include such practices as prayer, fasting, Scripture reading, memorization, and meditation, silence, and solitude that are intentionally practiced to open oneself up to God's working in one's life. According to Dallas Willard, these practices help bring about Christian spiritual formation—the transformation of the inner heart, mind, will, or spirit of a person into the inner heart, mind, will, or spirit of Christ—by bringing about what cannot be achieved by direct effort. See Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990). See also Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th Anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

⁴⁶ For an examination of the spiritual rhythms of Christ and their relationship to his mission, see L. Paul Jensen, *Subversive Spirituality: Transforming Mission through the Collapse of Space and Time*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

There is little doubt that there is tremendous interest in the real, authentic, human Jesus that is portrayed in the gospels.⁴⁷ Certainly there is more interest in Jesus than “Christianity,” “organized religion,” or a system of beliefs.⁴⁸ And while many non-Christians think that they understand who Christians believe Jesus to be, many merely know a bland, sterile, stereotypical Jesus who is nice, witty, and a bumper sticker for Christians.⁴⁹ This part of the story introduces the hearers to the real Jesus.

The Radical Life of a Disciple

After Jesus faces temptation, he begins to call his disciples. Peter, Andrew, James, and John respond “immediately,” showing the proper response to the Messiah. This is a call to mission—to make fishers of people—with the formation of a new community, centered around Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount, delivered to the disciples after their missional calling, shows what this new community is to be like.

There are many parts of the Sermon on the Mount which address postmodern concerns. The Beatitudes envision an alternative world, in which the “poor in spirit” inherit the earth and the persecuted, marginalized and prophetic voices receive the kingdom of God. The kingdom ethic goes beyond right actions to right heart and right motivation, rejecting the performance of religious actions to impress others. Kingdom living is characterized by things such as love for one’s enemies, faithfulness in marriage,

⁴⁷ Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 60-70.

⁴⁸ Nick Pollard, *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult: How to Interest People Who Aren't Interested* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 116.

⁴⁹ Rick Richardson, Terry Erickson, and Judy Johnson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey : Participant's Guide* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect, 2008), 28.

forgiveness of others, keeping one's word, abandonment of vengeance, lack of worry, rejection of materialism, trust in the Father, and actual implementation of Jesus' teachings. Some of these teachings, such as the critique of insincere religion, postmoderns would enthusiastically embrace.⁵⁰ Other teachings, such as issues of sexuality, would be counter-cultural.⁵¹ This community, however, is a light to the world, doing good deeds that cause others to praise God.

The Sermon on the Mount should not be presented as mere morality (right and wrong). Instead, these teachings ought to be presented as a new way of living—the way of Jesus—for a new community that seeks to emulate Christ. Jesus' life is a “*paradigm*, a normative pattern,” of how his disciples should live, and his teachings should be interpreted in light of his story and the paradigmatic stories that he tells.⁵² Furthermore, the Spirit of God helps believers in following God's commandments (Ex 36:26-27).

The Road to the Cross

Jesus spends a period of about three years going through the countryside and villages preaching, teaching, and healing people. Eventually, however, he begins his trek to Jerusalem, the center of power for the corrupt religious leaders. Along the way Jesus predicts his betrayal, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. In response to the disciples'

⁵⁰ Research indicates that 89 percent of young outsiders (aged 16 to 29) and 52 percent of young churchgoers (aged 16 to 29) think Christians are judgmental. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity--and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007).

⁵¹ Baudrillard sees sexuality and the postmodern condition as the recombination of all forms of sexuality and a “time of transvestism.” See Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, 137.

⁵² William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 10-11. The Good Samaritan is a paradigmatic story that Jesus tells to define love of one's neighbor.

misunderstanding of the nature of his kingdom and their quest for power, Jesus calls the disciples together and presents a vision of servant leadership with himself as the example: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). This statement summarizes most of Jesus’ life and purpose, and it is an explicit statement of one aspect of atonement that is highlighted in *The Story of Redemption*: ransom. While ransom is an incomplete metaphor, here ransom is interpreted primarily as freedom from sin and its enslaving, broken, and hurtful effects.

The story slows down considerably as Jesus enters Jerusalem. He is cheered on by the crowds as he fulfills Messianic prophecies by riding in on a donkey. As priest, king, and the Son of God, Jesus goes to the temple to confront the religious leaders. He cleanses the temple of the money changers, heals in the temple, teaches in the temple, and pronounces judgment against the religious leaders in the temple. These actions cause the chief priests to begin to look for a “sly way” to kill Jesus that does not upset the people, and they find a willing accomplice in Judas, one of Jesus’ disciples. For thirty pieces of silver, Judas agrees to betray Jesus at the right opportunity.

The night of Jesus’ betrayal, Jesus shares a last supper with the disciples. There he again tells them about his betrayal. His disciples all deny that they will betray him, and Peter and the rest all vow to die for Jesus. After the meal, Jesus goes off to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, asking the disciples to keep watch. In his prayers, Jesus asks the Father to take away his cup of suffering if possible, but prays also for God’s will to be done. Jesus goes to pray three times, and each time he comes back to find the disciples sleeping. The last time he tells them to awake, for Judas has come with soldiers. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. The disciples begin to fight for him; however, Jesus stays their

hands, reminding them that violence is not the way of his kingdom. He tells them that he could at any moment call ten legions of angels to fight for him. His disciples flee at that moment, leaving Jesus all alone. Everything in the narrative shows Jesus' knowledge of his death, power to stop his death, and yet his willingness to die for humanity.

There are many aspects of this part of the story that have the ability to touch postmoderns. Jesus' chasing out the temple changers and challenging of the authority and corruption of religious leaders may be cheered, as postmoderns are suspicious of religious institutions.⁵³ Jesus' call to service is especially appealing to younger generations, who regularly serve and volunteer.⁵⁴ Postmoderns who have experienced hurt and brokenness can profoundly identify with Jesus, as he experiences betrayal, abandonment, anxiety, frustration, loneliness, and ultimately, death.⁵⁵ The actual reading of this narrative—rather than a mere summary or propositional statements—can have a powerful effect on the hearers.

Jesus' Trial and Crucifixion

After Jesus is arrested, he is put on trial. Jesus remains silent through false charges, but finally says that he is the Christ, the son of God. He also tells of the coming of the Son of Man back in judgment against those who are about to kill him. The high priest charges him with blasphemy, and Jesus is condemned to death by the Sanhedrin. Jesus is then taken to the Roman governor Pilate for trial. Though Pilate believes Jesus to

⁵³ Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 52-72.

⁵⁴ Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 45.

⁵⁵ Richard W. Flory and Donald E. Miller, *Genx Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 39.

be innocent, he consents to Jesus being put to death. Jesus is led away to be beaten, ridiculed, and crucified. On the cross he cries out, asking why God has forsaken him. Then he gives up his Spirit.

The same themes that resonate with postmoderns in part six of the story—including abandonment, loneliness, and suffering—are repeated and intensified through Christ's trials and crucifixion. There is little theologizing or explaining that needs to be done at this point. The impact of the cross simply needs to be taken in by the hearer. Christ died for all. There is incredible power in this story.

Taking Hold of the New Life

When Jesus dies, there is an earthquake, many people come back to life, and the curtain of the temple is torn in two, symbolizing God's availability to all. Seeing this, the centurion confesses that Jesus is the Son of God. Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus, asks Pilate for Jesus' body, and he has Jesus buried in his own tomb. The religious leaders, knowing of Jesus' prediction that he would be raised from the dead, tell Pilate that Jesus' disciples will try to steal Jesus' body. Pilate tells them to go and make his tomb as secure as they can, with a Roman seal and the posting of guards. Jesus is laid securely in the tomb, with the long day of Saturday symbolizing the death and despair found in postmodern culture.⁵⁶

On the first day of the week, the women go to Jesus' tomb. There is an earthquake, and an angel of the Lord rolls back the tombstone. The angel tells the women that Jesus has been raised from the dead. The women go into Galilee, afraid but filled

⁵⁶ Saturday only makes Sunday all the more meaningful. See Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

with joy. On the way, they are met by the risen Jesus, and they bow down and worship him. They are then sent to tell his brothers in Galilee that he has been raised.⁵⁷ Matthew concludes with the risen Savior giving the Great Commission, sending his disciples into the world to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey Christ's commands. As they engage in mission, Christ will be "with them" through his Spirit.⁵⁸

What is the significance of the resurrection? Here the explicit teaching of Paul may be helpful. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul identifies the gospel as Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. He then further explains why the resurrection is "good news." Because Christ was resurrected, humanity will be resurrected. Human bodies, currently ravaged with cancer, death, and other ailments, will be transformed into imperishable, incorruptible, spiritual bodies. The people of God, fully infused with the Spirit, will be "like Christ"—sinless. At the resurrection, Christ's victory over death will be complete (1 Cor 15:20-56), and the world itself and all of creation will be redeemed (Rm 8:18f).

The resurrection story is, first and fundamentally, a story of hope. Hope is desperately needed by postmoderns, a condition evidenced in culture through cynicism towards politics and religion, concern for global warming and terrorism, and an endless array of end of the world, apocalyptic books and movies.⁵⁹ The authors of *The Gift of Story: Narrating Hope in a Postmodern World* write, "From a Christian perspective,

⁵⁷ *The Story of Redemption* gives some traditional apologetics for the resurrection; however, it is readily admitted that the resurrection cannot be "proved," but must be accepted on faith.

⁵⁸ *The Story of Redemption* stays almost exclusively in Genesis and Matthew through most of the study, following the stories as they are found. This can help avoid the mistrust and suspicions of manipulation that is often created from jumping from verse to verse and proof texting. The shift to Paul comes at the end of the study after trust is hopefully built in the hearer.

⁵⁹ Robert Detweiler, "Theological Trends of Postmodern Fiction," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no. 2 (1976): 225-37.

story and storytelling are gifts that can nourish our imaginations, fortify our confidence, and help us resist evil and despair.”⁶⁰ It is important to note, however, that the Christian hope is more than an anthropomorphic hope based upon human vision, inspiration, and effort. While the Spirit is at work in popular culture, the Christian hope is a specific hope rooted in that which only God can do: resurrect the dead. Jesus’ resurrection points towards the eschatological end to which all of the biblical narrative is building—the restoration of God, humanity, and all creation. Ultimately, though, the end story is more than simply a replication of the Garden of Eden. God is creating a new heaven and earth, with people of every tribe and nation gathered around the throne of God (Rv 21-22).⁶¹

How does one take hold of the new life offered in Christ? *The Story of Redemption* concludes with a call for the hearer to join in the gospel story by placing his or her faith in Christ and join in his mission. Traditionally, Churches of Christ have laid out the “five steps” salvation as hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized. These should be seen as expressions of faith in Christ. These “steps,” however, only make sense to those who actually have heard and witnessed the gospel story, which many postmoderns have not. Furthermore, a “step” presentation of salvation is clearly modern in form and not as effective with postmoderns, who respond more to salvation when it is presented as an “invitation to a journey.”

⁶⁰ Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *The Gift of Story: A Wise Tale About What Is Enough*, 1st ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 19-21.

⁶¹ Eschatology provides a basis for purpose in life, which drives ethical living. Cameron Lee, "Agency and Purpose in Narrative Therapy: Questioning the Postmodern Rejection of Metanarrative," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 3 (2004). Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 248-49. The retaining of a multiplicity of ethnic groups and languages in the new heaven and earth well fits postmodernism’s particularity.

Not all hearers will be ready to be baptized at this point. For the truly unchurched, conversion may take years.⁶² The continued emphasis upon baptism, however, is not accidental. Not only is baptism a trusting act of faith at which time a person receives salvation, forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, and is incorporated into the body of Christ, but it is a visible re-enactment of a fundamental part of the redemption story—Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (Rm 6:1-4).⁶³ The emphasis upon resurrection shows that baptism is not only an end, but a new beginning. The new beginning is being a part of a loving community in fellowship with God, one another, and creation, partnering with God through Christ and the Spirit in his mission of bringing about a people and world where God’s will is done. Thus, *The Story of Redemption* ends with a call to mission, helping the potential new convert to see that mission is a fundamental part of what it means to a follower of Christ. This salvation and mission in which the Christ follower participates goes far beyond individual salvation to communal salvation in the church and cosmic salvation of the world and creation itself.⁶⁴

⁶² Peace contrasts the slow conversion process of the disciples with the sudden, dramatic conversion of Paul, holding these up as examples of different ways people come to faith. Richard Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

⁶³ Bryan Stone writes, “Baptism initiates us into *ecclesia* through our narrative identification with the history of Jesus and our incorporation by grace into the life-death-resurrection pattern of Christ himself, a pattern within which the entire Christian life is to be lived.” Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), 183.

⁶⁴ *The Story of Redemption* seeks to go beyond offering an overly individualistic, transactional, or reductionistic gospel. Modern thinking led to an emphasis upon “method, programs, results, and measurement,” which could best be achieved through either logical presentations or emotional appeals. The quickest, most effective way to get results was by reducing the gospel to praying the sinner’s prayer in order to receive forgiveness of sins and go to heaven. See Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 109-17. This reduction of the gospel in typical evangelical Christianity has created numerous problems. First, the communal nature of the New Testament is ignored. Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*, Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 81. There must be a corporate understanding of conversion. Smith, *Transforming Conversion*, 41. Second, postmoderns are looking for a practical faith that impacts them now, and are less interested in a

Throughout the study, the Christians in the study should be sharing their own stories about God—not only their conversion, but how God has been active and alive in their daily lives.⁶⁵ Telling these stories helps build trust in the hearers. Before people can share, however, they must reflect upon their own stories of hope—not based upon their strength, but upon God’s work through Christ in the past, present, and future.

Joining the Narrative through Small Groups, Community Witness and Worship, and *Communitas* Experiences

The Story of Redemption is indeed a grand story that can bring meaning to postmoderns’ lives. This story, however, must be shared, heard, and experienced to impact them. There are several ways that postmoderns can join in this gospel narrative.

Joining the Narrative through Small Groups

The Story of Redemption can be successfully shared in a one-on-one study or even gone through as a correspondence study; however, there are several reasons that a more ideal way to share the study is through seeker small groups. The first reason is that these seeker small groups can be formed out of the natural affinity groups that already exist in both church and nonchurched settings, drawing upon social networking principles. This is the pattern used by the evangelistic course, *Alpha*, which has had success in England and, increasingly, the United States, in leading a person to faith in Jesus Christ.⁶⁶

future heaven. Detweiler and Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings*, 235. Third, the transactional view of salvation produces nominal believers, not true disciples,

⁶⁵ Peace rightly states, “As Christians tell stories from their spiritual pilgrimage, others start thinking about their experiences of God.” Peace, *Holy Conversation*, 34-36.

⁶⁶ *Alpha* is a tool for introducing unchurched people to Christ and Christianity that was “birthed” out of the Holy Trinity church in England, a charismatic, Anglican Church. Stephen Hunt, *Anyone for*

A second reason that seeker small groups are to be preferred in sharing *The Story of Redemption* is that small groups aid tremendously in community formation where it does not exist (as discussed above). A third reason is that the concepts found within the study become more real as they are discussed in the small group. Wuthnow explains that “social scientists have often noted the importance of social interaction for understanding the plausibility of beliefs and ideas.”⁶⁷ A fourth reason is that research has shown that when non-Christians are in a Christian social network such as a small group, they are much more likely to be a good neighbor and give to and serve others—which is part of what they are learning to live out in the study.⁶⁸ A fifth reason is that a small group setting multiplies the number of gifts that can be brought to bear in the study, potentially making the study more successful (see above).⁶⁹

Sharing the Good News through Online Community Witness

The online world provides tremendous opportunity for sharing the good news with the unchurched in several different ways. First, as is discussed above, an online

Alpha? Evangelism in a Post-Christian Society (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2001), xi. Hunt. *Alpha* draws upon the homogenous unit principle, which is the idea, introduced by Donald McGavran and popularized by Peter Wagner, that people come to faith more readily when they do not have to cross significant social lines. Hunt, 17. See Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth*, Third ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). While this principle is practically true, care must be taken that new Christians do not get the impression that they have no obligation to extend the gospel outside of these natural social circles.

⁶⁷ “Ideas from the Bible became more real for two reasons. They were there in print, in the first place, and everyone knew they were there. In other words, the act of sitting in one another’s presence and looking at the same words from the printed page helped underscore the existence of biblical idea . . . But the more important reason was that the ideas were generally reinforced by the personal experiences of people in the group.” Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 279.

⁶⁸ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 471-79.

⁶⁹ Peace, *Small Group Evangelism*, 5.

Facebook group can be formed for those who are going through *The Story of Redemption*, where the unchurched can more fully experience the witness of the Christian community; however, this online witness does not have to be limited to these groups but can be shared anytime online. As the Church lives out its life for the world to see, it demonstrates what it means to be shaped by the biblical narrative rather than the social, economic, or political narratives of the world.⁷⁰ Thus, to truly be “evangelistic,” online interactions must do much more than advertise church events. Churches and individuals must interact in such a way that they demonstrate that which makes the church distinctive—the love and faith of the Christian community and the “*confession* of [Jesus’] lordship in baptism, worship, discipline, and obedience.”⁷¹

Second, the presence of the Christian community online has the potential to breakdown negative stereotypes of Christians—stereotypes that are particularly present in younger Americans, who also happen to be avid online users.⁷² While Christians should hold to their convictions on truth, righteousness, and sexuality, they should discuss such issues with love, making sure that their conversation is “seasoned with grace,” and that these issues are not overemphasized. Online users have a tendency to be less civil in discussions online than in person. Christians must resist all such temptations.

⁷⁰ Heidi Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, 39-40.

⁷¹ Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 194-95. McLaren says that faith was an “embarrassment” in the modern world, but it is a “way of life” for postmoderns. See Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 175.

⁷² Kinnaman’s research of non-Christian young adults shows that they view Christians to be hypocritical, judgmental, and anti-homosexual. Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*. See also Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 136-62.

Third, by placing Christian pictures and video online, the Christian message can be experienced, appealing to today's right-brained, image driven culture. Leonard Sweet rightly invites the Church to visually present the gospel, explaining that "we are a print-saturated, word-based church in the midst of visual technologies that are creating a whole new visual culture."⁷³ The emotion that is evoked by these images is powerful, and can be even more effective than reason in reaching postmoderns, who are skeptical of logic and arguments as a means to truth. The Church needs to recover the power of images, symbols, and stories—virtually eliminated in modern presentations of the gospel—to effectively communicate the gospel today.⁷⁴ In particular, testimonials of how people have come to faith in Jesus Christ are effective in sharing the gospel.⁷⁵

Sharing the Good News through Real World Community Witness and Worship

The unchurched who join in a small group study of *The Story of Redemption* and an online group formed around this study can have a powerful experience of community; however, at some point along this process, an experience of the larger church community, especially in worship, usually will occur. The Christians within the small group typically

⁷³ Leonard I. Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 91-95. Shane Hipps explains how the shift to a print-based culture through the printing press contributed highly to modernism, leading to individualism, the myth of objectivity, and linear, rational thinking. See Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, 53-61.

⁷⁴ Heath White states that "emotion and the vehicles that produce it, like pictures, films, stories, plays, and poems, are not necessarily any less reliable, and are possibly more powerful, than logic and its vehicles." See White, *Postmodernism 101*, 82. Robert Webber contends that the "primary way of communicating faith is through a combination of oral, visual, and print forms of participatory immersed communication." See Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 65. Neil Livingstone's work is devoted to showing the presence and power of gospel images in the Scriptures. Neil Livingstone, *Picturing the Gospel: Tapping the Power of the Bible's Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

⁷⁵ Lindsey is a new Christian who was converted through *The Story of Redemption* (as discussed above), made a testimonial video, and shared it on Facebook. This video made a tremendous impact upon some of her unchurched friends, leading them to want study *The Story of Redemption* with Lindsey.

begin to invite the unchurched to worship with them if they have not done so already, and/or the unchurched, having had negative stereotypes about Christians broken down, may begin to be curious and seek out the church's worship on their own. This exploration of the worship assembly is good, for an experience of worship with the body is often necessary in order for full conversion to occur. Sociologically, the importance of the corporate worship assembly has been engrained in the consciousness of Americans. Theologically, there is also something significant about the body of Christ as it gathers, particularly in worship, which is significant for evangelism.

As the people of God who live under God's reign, the community that gathers bears witness to *The Story of Redemption*, for "the concrete life of a believing community is an essential expression of the credibility of the gospel to which it bears witness."⁷⁶ Bryan Stone, author of *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, makes this claim: "The most evangelistic thing the church can do today is to be the church—to be formed imaginatively by the Holy Spirit through core practices such as worship, forgiveness, hospitality, and economic sharing into a distinctive people in the world, a new social option, the body of Christ."⁷⁷ While not denying a more specific type of evangelism, Stone defines evangelism in terms of witness, believing that all that the church does as a church is evangelistic, or witness-bearing.⁷⁸ Flett, however, states, "Given the temptation for the community to curve in

⁷⁶ Joon-Sik Park, "Hospitality as Context for Evangelism," *Missiology* 30, no. 3 (2002): 390.

⁷⁷ Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 15.

⁷⁸ Stone writes, "Literally everything Christians do—indeed, the very existence of the church along with its distinctive social patterns and processes—may properly be construed as evangelism. On the other hand, we may also understand evangelism as a distinct, identifiable, socially established, cooperative,

upon itself, mission directs the form of witness. ‘Witness does not reduce to the internal life of the church: the community is not an end in herself.’⁷⁹ If true, then the church’s worship ought to confirm the *The Story of Redemption*, helping a person come to faith.

Sharing the Good News with the Help of *Communitas* Experiences

Finally, while *The Story of Redemption* can be used effectively to lead a person to Christ, especially when amplified through a small group with online interaction, there is an additional element that could potentially help in conversion: *communitas*. Following Victor Turner’s work, Hirsch highlights the importance of *communitas* in transforming people. *Communitas* is the incredibly powerful experience of community that occurs when people are placed together in a *liminal* state—an unusual or disorienting place of circumstance, “a fundamental change of state or social position”—and work together towards a common goal or mission.⁸⁰ While Hirsch applies this phenomenon to Christians who are on mission, the same transformation can happen to non-Christians and seekers when placed in a *liminal* state with others. This transformation can be seen in the youth “camp experience” phenomenon, where Christian teens and unchurched teens go to camp not knowing one another—perhaps not even liking one another—and end up at the conclusion of the camp being best friends and together committing their lives to Christ.

and intentional practice.” Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 15, 48. Abraham also sees the Christian community as a whole as being intimately tied to evangelism: “For the early Christians it would have been unthinkable to have evangelism without community and community without evangelism.” Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 44, 57.

⁷⁹ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 293.

⁸⁰ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 217-35. Frost and Hirsch’s new work, *The Faith of Leap*, is devoted to the study of “risk, liminality, *communitas*, and its implications in the life of faith and in leadership.” Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Faith of Leap: Embracing a Theology of Risk, Adventure & Courage*, Shapevine (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 13.

In the same way, many adults can be aided in their decision for Christ by a camp type of experience. By getting away from the everyday routine of life with other seekers and Christians, seekers can reconsider their lives. The Alpha course, another type of seeker small group study, intentionally creates a *communitas* type of experience for those who go through the study by having a weekend retreat.⁸¹ Seekers who are going through *The Story of Redemption* can be invited to these types of spiritual retreats to help them in their decision for Christ. Additionally, short-term missions or serving together as a group, particularly in a non-suburban area such as an inner city or foreign country, can help middle class suburbanites break out of their hurried, but safe and comfortable, routines—helping them to make the decision to believe in Christ, place their faith in him, and be baptized.⁸² Since the pursuit of Christ’s mission is a fundamental part of the decision that they are making, and this brings about a powerful experience of *communitas*, the incorporation of mission “pre-conversion” demonstrates the normative life of mission to which seekers are being called to live.⁸³ At its best, this provides an enticing look at the dynamic, fulfilling, and incredible life of a Christ-follower who is joined together with a merry band of other Christ-followers on Christ’s glorious and exciting mission—seeking the lost, serving the community, and sharing the good news.

⁸¹ Gumbel, *How to Run an Alpha Course*.

⁸² Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 42, 219.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 221.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

“As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you” (Jn 20:21). In this paper, I have presented a missional outreach strategy for the High Pointe Church of Christ. If it were possible to construct a missional theology and strategy off of a single verse, John 20:21 would be the basis for this missional theology and strategy. As this verse testifies, God is fundamentally a sending God, and his people are fundamentally a sent people. Furthermore, Jesus is the model for this sending. This points the church to an examination of Jesus’ life and mission to determine its own life and mission. This examination has led to the formulation of the missional outreach strategy outlined in this paper—seeking the lost (Lk 19:10), serving the community (Mk 10:45), and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God (Lk 4:43).

In his book, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard of the Church*, McNeal argues that if a church is to be viewed to be “successful,” it must change the church’s scorecard from institutional to missional markers.¹ If this is true, then the success of High Pointe’s missional outreach strategy must be judged based upon these missional markers. From this missional scorecard, many markers point towards the success of this strategy.

First, High Pointe has grown dramatically in its giving toward outreach. McNeal says that “the clearest sign that a conversion from ‘churchianity’ (internally focused and church-centric) to missional engagement has occurred shows up in the church budget.”²

¹ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*. This is the premise of the entire book.

² Ibid., 82.

Each year, High Pointe has a “Harvest Sunday,” a day in which all that is given and pledged goes towards outreach. In 2007, the year before I came, Harvest Sunday giving was at \$119,931. Within this budget, approximately 75 percent was devoted to foreign outreach, and 25 percent was devoted to local outreach. When we told the congregation that we would reach out locally like we had reached out overseas, and that the giving would be divided evenly between local and foreign outreach, there was a tremendous response. Harvest Sunday giving over the last three years has averaged \$175,003, with a high of \$189,800. This is an average increase of 46 percent, and a high increase of 58 percent. Amazingly, this has happened during the midst of “The Great Recession.” In addition to Harvest Sunday, members have donated untold numbers of canned goods, clothing, school supplies, and household items for the community. One member even donated a substantial amount of her inheritance to help fund the food pantry ministry.

Second, High Pointe has clearly scored high missional marks on its service to the community, especially in its response to the financial needs of the community. The food pantry ministry, which barely existed in 2007, has helped feed nearly 10,000 families and individuals the past three years. Partnerships for this have been formed with a local grocery store, and the church will soon become a distributor of food for the North Texas Food Bank. The clothes closet ministry, which has a long history, has been spotlighted and raised in prominence. It is now seen as a key part of our missional efforts, along with our food pantry, and over the last three years nearly 15,000 families and individuals have been clothed. Three Habitat for Humanity homes have been built. In addition, over two hundred people have gone through Financial Peace University and over two hundred community group meetings have been hosted in the building the past two years.

The church has helped serve people with relational and emotional needs as well. The Celebrate Recovery ministry was begun to help people overcome life struggles, and over 100 meetings have been held. The Dynamic Marriage ministry was also begun, with five groups already having gone through this, including over twenty couples from the community. Vega Elementary was adopted, not only to help children financially, but to be a help and hope to the teachers, parents, and administrators.

Third, several missional markers for “seeking the lost” and “sharing the good news” have clearly been raised. High Pointe’s church planting efforts and partnerships has resulted in the planting of seven Latino churches, the church’s first local plants. Seeker small groups, missional small group, and missional communities have formed or are in the process of forming, missional expressions which did not previously exist. The church now has a significant online social networking presence, from Facebook to Twitter to blogging, and sermons shared virally online. In comparison, in 2007 the church had no online social networking presence and had only a one page “website.” The evangelistic Bible study, *The Story of Redemption*, has been further refined and used extensively. All of the local outreach efforts have resulted in over two hundred baptisms the past three years, with nearly every missional outreach ministry resulting in converts.

Fourth, the church scores relatively high on what McNeal calls “people development,” rather than program development.³ This can be seen in that all of the new missional outreach ministries have grown out of people’s spiritual gifts, and therefore their passions. This people focus can be seen in the care and attention giving to those who are served. For instance, those who are fed through the food pantry also receive love and

³ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 10.

prayer. (The number of people prayed with was at one time tracked until this tracking became problematic.) One woman who came through the food pantry asked for prayers to get a job. She got a job, and then came back to the church to thank the church for its prayers. She also dropped off a tithe, saying that she wanted to start tithing to the church that prayed for her.⁴ This people focus can also be seen through the “non-programmed,” spontaneous acts of its members in serving others, as when, for instance, a group of individuals came together to buy a car for the friend of a member who had major medical issues and whose house had burned down.

Fifth, the congregation has self-reported that the missional outreach strategy has been successful. Whereas the congregational survey in 2006 showed a very low satisfaction level as to the church’s local outreach efforts, a 2011 congregational survey ranked outreach as the congregation’s strongest ministry, especially the food pantry and clothes closet ministries and evangelistic Bible studies. Clearly, this strategy has had a significant impact upon the community and the church, and it has given High Pointe—a congregation that has been beset for years with leadership and staff issues, financial debt, declining membership, and doctrinal disputes—a much needed, positive identity.

There are, however, indications that this missional outreach strategy has had limitations in bringing about a missional transformation at High Pointe. First, despite all of the high “missional marks” and enthusiastic response from the congregation, much of the official leadership has had mixed feelings about this success. In fact, in many ways High Pointe’s missional transformation has been too successful, particularly in regards to

⁴ McNeal writes, “We should feed hungry people. But when their stomachs are full, we should also teach them or mentor them or find them work.” McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 91.

the increase in outreach giving. McNeal says, “Encourage ways for members to contribute to community causes through the church. Encourage this rather than seeing it as a threat to ‘church money.’” The dramatic increase in financial giving towards outreach, however, has indeed been seen as a threat, both to the church’s financial stability and to its ability to address its \$3 million debt. One church leader even said that the leadership had let this outreach giving get “way out of control,” and that it was robbing the church of funding towards its “core” (internal) ministries. This problem has been exacerbated by “The Great Recession” that struck just as I began at High Pointe; however, the church was running a significant deficit even before “The Great Recession” and before the missional emphasis began. Some had apparently hoped that becoming a missional church would result in a quick and substantial increase in regular giving; however, this has not happened due to the economy and various church issues.⁵ Furthermore, many of the original leaders who were supportive of the missional direction are no longer in leadership for various reasons.

Second, despite the fact the congregation receives high “people development” marks, it may be that the prominence of all of the great outreach ministries at the church have caused some to think of missional outreach in programmatic terms, rather than as a way of life. The missional success of these ministries has been able to be tracked, counted, and celebrated, with positive results. Daily missional living is more difficult to

⁵ This is not necessarily the end result of missional transitions. I implemented a similar missional outreach strategy as a minister at the Liberty Church of Christ and over the course of six years, the church’s giving increased 90 percent. The recent three-year period, however, included “The Great Recession.”

measure, but needs to be encouraged to an even greater extent.⁶ Additionally, if more missional outreach were done through small groups, this would help make missional outreach more a natural part of people's daily lives.⁷ It is clear that the type of viral, passionate, and exponential sharing of one's faith that is seen in the Book of Acts and postulated in missional writing has yet to be realized at High Pointe.⁸

Three final conclusions can be made. First, the missional outreach strategy that I have implemented over the last three years at the High Pointe Church of Christ has resulted in a tremendous impact upon the community. Without this strategy, far fewer people would have been fed, clothed, helped with their lives and marriages, experienced Christian community, or have been baptized. I sincerely believe that our community would now mourn our loss if this church were to disappear. Second, a full frontal missional outreach strategy such as has been employed at High Pointe will have the most impact, but it will also raise the most resistance—particularly if the church is financially challenged.⁹ Finally, while much can be done through missional transformation in an established church, church planting still may be the best hope for making mission a church's true organizing principle.

⁶ A church could attempt to count spiritual conversations or daily acts of service, but this likely would be viewed as invasive by members. Perhaps a congregational survey could be developed where people answer questions about their daily involvement in missional outreach.

⁷ Had I to do this over again, I might seek to emphasize the missional small groups and missional communities more, rather than the centralized service ministries, despite their great success, for these groups could help the disconnected at High Pointe see that missional outreach could help their relationships as well. I was, however, largely following the heart of the congregation, and was short on staff.

⁸ This is what Hirsch calls a "Jesus movement." Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 158.

⁹ It may be that a more incremental approach by someone with more patience than I have might result in greater impact over time, though perhaps not. For a work on bringing about missional transformation in an established congregation, see Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*.

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