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THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION, MENTORING, AND PEER LEARNING  
OF EMERGING PASTORAL LEADERS

By

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE  
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
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Stephen C. Baldwin

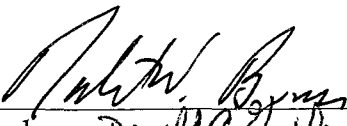
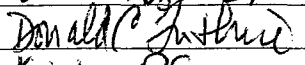
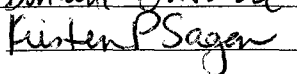
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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the development of emerging pastoral leaders in spiritual formation through structured peer relationships and mentoring. A great need exists to increase in the understanding of spiritual formation: how it occurs and how to cultivate it in the emerging generation of pastoral leaders.

The researcher employs a qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews with six pastors of non-denominational, Baptist General Conference, and Presbyterian Church in America affiliations. Both the literature review and the analysis of the six interviews focus on the experience of pastors in structured peer relationships and consistent mentoring processes. The review begins with foundational biblical literature indicative to the relationship between mentoring and spiritual formation, followed by three additional areas of focus: spiritual formation, structured peer relationships, and literature on emerging adults.

In this study, a positive correlation surfaces between the spiritual formation of individuals and their experiences of trust, safety, and vulnerability in a community of peers. These “communities of practice” are characterized by a commitment to the process of growth and maturation in one another’s lives as they work in a shared calling.

In the area of emerging adulthood, the findings of this study reveal the radical changes in the culture that have shaped a generation. That generation manifests unique gifts for collaborative leadership and creativity. It also exhibits unique challenges and needs. Emerging pastoral leaders in this stage of life are seeking mentors to walk with them as they live life, and grow in their calling as vocational ministers.

This study identifies a great need for mentors and spiritual directors, those who attend to the spiritual formation of the emerging generation of pastoral leaders as they move into primary leadership roles in the church. The future of the church—its health, well-being and vitality—depends upon pastoral leaders who genuinely live out a life of Christian character in the midst of their community.

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The Lord of Heaven and Earth  
for redeeming my life for his good purposes.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### A New and Different Generation

In the last fifty years the pace and scope of changes in the culture have been staggering.<sup>1</sup> Speaking to leaders in his denomination, Timothy Keller observed, “In general, the PCA knows how to thrive in the shrinking enclaves of traditional people, but does not know how to thrive in this increasing post-everything culture.”<sup>2</sup> According to Keller, pastoral leaders must change in order to reach Americans in the current cultural context.<sup>3</sup> Keller asserts that “our usual methods of ministry do not work effectively in the parts of the country and the sectors of society that have the greatest power in our culture.”<sup>4</sup> In addition, a different sort of generation is on the rise. In “Millennials Go to College,” Neil Howe and William Strauss state, “The Millennial Generation, born from 1982 through the present,

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<sup>1</sup> J. M. Houston, *The Mentored Life: From Individualism to Personhood* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Timothy J. Keller, “Post-Everythings,” Westminster Theological Seminary, [http://www.wts.edu/resources/articles/keller\\_posteverything.html](http://www.wts.edu/resources/articles/keller_posteverything.html) (accessed December 7 2009). Keller asks of the PCA, “How do we, as a denomination, do renewal and outreach in the emerging post-everything United States culture? ‘Post-everything’ people are those who are now in their teens and twenties – and they are our future.”

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Keller says, “Michael Wolfe, in *New York Magazine* said we are fundamentally two nations. “*There is the quicker-growing, economically vibrant, morally relativist, urban-oriented, culturally adventurous, sexually polymorphist and ethnically diverse nation. Then there is also the smaller-town, suburban, nuclear-family, religiously oriented, traditional values, white-centric other America with its diminished political and economic force.*” America still has enough places dominated by this latter “nation” that the PCA can continue to grow among already-conservative people. However, our usual methods of ministry do not work effectively in the parts of the country and the sectors of society that have the greatest power in our culture. Our ineffectiveness as a denomination in working with post-everything America is a failure across party lines. Whether we identify ourselves as “Evangelically Reformed,” “Confessionally Reformed” or “Old-school” we face similar failures. All our parties tend to limit their evangelism and discipleship to people who are basically traditional in their mindset.”

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Keller says to the PCA, “let us confess that we really have failure across all our parties to reach the coming society, and let us resolve to use the premier resources of Reformed theology. If we can make these changes, then we may really start to see renewal and outreach, and we might actually be a resource for the broader body of Christ in this culture.”

represents a generational cohort, distinct from their parents of the Baby Boom generation, and their immediate predecessors, Generation X.”<sup>5</sup> This is a generation with strengths, limitations, needs, culture, and personality all its own.

Three generations ago the Jesus Movement<sup>6</sup> was a breath of the Spirit against the backdrop of the Vietnam War and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, and Martin Luther King.<sup>7</sup> As a result of this ripple of revival, large numbers of converts from the 60s and 70s went to seminary, pastored churches, became missionaries, and served as Christian workers around the world.<sup>8</sup> But the children and grandchildren of those who shed their drugs in order to “lend an ear to a love song”<sup>9</sup> are living in a radically different world.<sup>10</sup>

Elliott Currie’s research into the culture that shaped privileged middle-class adolescents is deeply disturbing. In *The Road to Whatever: Middle-Class Culture and the Crisis of Adolescence*, Currie says that this, the first half of the emerging-adult demographic,<sup>11</sup> has

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<sup>5</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Go to College: Strategies for a New Generation on Campus : Recruiting and Admissions, Campus Life, and the Classroom* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> David Di Sabatino, *The Jesus People Movement: An Annotated Bibliography and General Resource*, *Bibliographies and Indexes in Religious Studies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 3,4. The Jesus Movement began in the late 1960s and ended in the late 1970s.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 4,5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Chuck Girard and Jesse Johnston, "A Love Song," in *Love Song* (N.p.: Dunamis Music, 1972). Love Song was an entire band that met Jesus and began writing songs about their conversion and following Jesus and recording them. They were among the first Christian recording artists and precursors of the Contemporary Christian Music. Some of these band members went on to have long and illustrious musical ministries associated with Maranatha! Music and Integrity Music.

<sup>10</sup> Currie, 121. “Many parents, in short, were themselves profoundly buffeted by the new American Darwinism, and their relations with their children cannot be fully understood without taking this into account.”

<sup>11</sup> Smith and Snell, 6. “A new, distinct, and important stage in life, emerging adulthood, situated between the teenage years and full-fledged adulthood, has emerged in American culture in recent decades — reshaping the meaning of self, youth, relationships, and life commitments as well as a variety of behaviors and dispositions among the young. As a result, life for many today between ages 18 and 30 years old, roughly, has morphed into a different experience from that of previous generations.”

been powerfully shaped by what he calls a particularly toxic, American form of social Darwinism.<sup>12</sup> In his section “The Sink-or-Swim Family,” Currie asserts that many of the parents of these youngest emerging adults, “were as constrained by the limits of a fundamentally unsupportive society as their children were.”<sup>13</sup> The resulting dysfunction affects every domain of human existence: social, moral, physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual. He points out, however that parents of emerging adults were active participants in, not victims of that society. Even the most affluent parents of the youngest of the new generational cohort, Currie says, held firmly to a worldview marked by,

The rejection of the idea of mutual responsibility, a righteous distaste for offering help, the acceptance or encouragement of a view of life in which a competitive scramble for individual preeminence and comfort is central, the insistence that even the most vulnerable must learn to handle life's difficulties by themselves and that if they cannot it is no one's fault but their own — these were not the idiosyncratic views of a few parents but pervasive themes in American society and culture during the years in which these teenagers were growing up.”<sup>14</sup>

The way the emerging adult generation views the world, feels about life, and about leadership vastly differs from their predecessors.<sup>15</sup> When these adolescents enter the

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<sup>12</sup> Currie, 121.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 121-122.

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner, *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, 1st ed., Decade of Behavior (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006); Elliott Currie, *Road to Whatever: Middle-Class Culture and the Crisis of Adolescence* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005); Julia Duin, *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful Are Fleeing and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008); Howe and Strauss; Scott Keeter, “Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change,” (2010) (accessed February 23, 2012); Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000); Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

“twenty-something” years, some will have a life-changing encounter with Christ.<sup>16</sup> They will discover the healing grace of God in Christ for both their wounds and for the core issue of their rebellion against—and alienation from—God. According to Currie, a dreadful combination of hunger for human connection and not caring about consequences (the “whatever” attitude) drives many middle-class adolescents to take increasingly frightful risks<sup>17</sup> But for some, their appetites, and the consequences of the high risks they take, will drive them toward God.<sup>18</sup> Among those will be some who choose to enter gospel ministry.<sup>19</sup> They will do so with gratitude for forgiveness and new life and a sense of high purpose, but also with deep scars, wounds, and issues from the days of their “care-lessness.”<sup>20</sup> Who will walk with them through growing maturity?

### *The Need for Pastor-Mentors and Peer Learning*

In *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, Sharon Daloz Parks notes that “the deepening divides between the generations [is] increasingly evident as a consequence of dramatic shifts within a rapidly

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<sup>16</sup> John 6:37–38 “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” Jesus’ statement means that this not merely an assertion. Rather it is a certainty.

<sup>17</sup> Currie, 17-40. Currie uses the term “care-lessness” to describe the attitude of the adolescents in his study, saying that they simply don’t care about the possibility of ruining, and even ending their lives. He says that startling numbers of middle-class kids are coming into the twenty-something years with multiple issues that were previously only seen in the hood. Brutal, urban core, poverty- and lower-class driven behaviors like: running away from home, getting into heavy drugs, meth, crack, heroine, burglary sprees, robbing on the street, stealing money and valuables from their own family, selling them to buy drugs, strings of car thefts, high-speed joy riding while drunk *and stoned*, multiple casual and high-risk sex partners, for young women this is often with older, dangerous men who have been in and out of prison. Some have been in rehab three or four times before their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:10 “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”

<sup>19</sup> Smith and Snell.

<sup>20</sup> Currie, 21.

changing society.”<sup>21</sup> James Houston detects a particular brokenness among this rising generation. In *The Mentored Life*, he likens the process of working with them to “house building after a disastrous flood or earthquake. But the house is not over our heads; it is inside us.”<sup>22</sup>

In *Becoming a Pastor: Reflections on the Transition into Ministry*, James P. Wind and David J. Wood observe the need for reflection and interaction with peers and pastoral mentors, especially at the beginning of immersion in vocational ministry.<sup>23</sup> Wind and Wood contrast this reflective process with a haphazard, sink-or-swim mentality—throwing novice pastoral leaders into the fray and letting them sort things out on their own.<sup>24</sup>

For the transition from theological study to pastoral ministry to be effective and fruitful, Wind and Wood contend that novice pastors need pastor-mentors to help them process and integrate theology and practice. Novice pastors also need help communicating the gospel message in ways that connect with and are meaningful to the specific local cultural context.<sup>25</sup> According to a study conducted by the Austin Presbyterian Seminary,<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Parks, xii.

<sup>22</sup> J. M. Houston, *The Mentored Life: From Individualism to Personhood* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 9. Houston is the founding principal and chancellor of Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia.

<sup>23</sup> Parks, xi.

<sup>24</sup> James P. Wind and David J. Wood, *Becoming a Pastor: Reflections on the Transition into Ministry* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008), 26. “There are three key players who help create the conditions for reflective immersion: mentoring pastors, peers-in-learning, and congregation members. The balance of these three catalysts—whether contact with the mentor is daily or occasional, whether peer groups are gathered or scattered, whether congregants are part of transition committees or just part of the congregation the participant leads—varies between the programs, but their presence and their care for the transitioning pastor distinguishes reflective immersion from the more common sink-or-swim style of immersion.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 110. Writing presciently concerning the task before the church from the perspective of foreign missions, Allen named three symptoms that faced the church in its mission that demonstrate this need. Allen says that despite the church's success in propagating the faith around the world; “(1) Everywhere Christianity is still an exotic. We have not succeeded in so planting it in any heathen land that it has become indigenous. (2) Everywhere our missions are dependent. They look to us for leaders, for instructors, for rulers...for men and money. (3) Everywhere we see the same types. Our missions are in different countries amongst peoples of the



structured peer relationships among pastoral leaders are uniquely suited to this transitional period and the learning process that is needed in it.<sup>27</sup> Ronald C. Cervero points to the strength of learning-in-community for vocational ministers in his essay “Building Systems of Continuing Education for the Professions.” In *A Lifelong Call to Learn* Cervero notes the superiority of learning-in-community from the ubiquitous weekend conference model.<sup>28</sup>

In order to equip their parishioners to carry out the mission of Christ, pastoral leaders must discover and employ maintainable paradigms, as espoused by Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government.<sup>29</sup> As Keller says, the challenge is to reach “those who are now in their teens and twenties, [for] they are our future.”<sup>30</sup> Wind and Wood argue that the health and viability of the church is at stake, as is its ability to speak into a changing world with the gospel.<sup>31</sup> Kristen Stewart has shown that a rising generation of pastoral

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most diverse characteristics, but all bear a most astonishing resemblance to one another.” This incisive observation, made over fifty years ago, is apt of the mission field America has become.

<sup>26</sup> Wind and Wood.

<sup>27</sup> Austin Presbyterian Seminary, *Is the Treatment the Cure? A Study of the Effects of Participation in Pastoral Leader Peer Groups* (Austin, TX: Austin Presbyterian Seminary, 2010). “Involvement in peer groups both reflects and shapes participatory and missional congregations.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Eldred Reber and D. Bruce Roberts, *A Lifelong Call to Learn: Continuing Education for Religious Leaders*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2010). Cervero notes that the ministry is the only profession that does not require continuing education for its practitioners.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002). Heifetz and Linsky contrast technical and adaptive challenges and the leadership required for each. When technical leadership skills are applied to adaptive challenges the outcomes are not sustainable. Getting the organization from “A to B” using the shortest distance — is considered to be a skill of the most effective leader. Heifetz and Linsky argue that this leadership style does not address the true, underlying challenges in an organization. This causes the real issues to resurface repeatedly, threatening the stability and the sustainability of the organization.

<sup>30</sup> Keller.

<sup>31</sup> Wind and Wood, 7. “Each generation takes its turn leading individuals up to and across the pastoral threshold. In each journey great things are at stake: the vocational future of an individual leader, the communal future of a congregation of believers, and the handing on of the faith from one generation to the next.” “The responsibilities of leadership and management are rarely discussed in theological seminary training. Indeed, pastors are generally surprised by how much leadership and management is involved in their work. And they must learn it on the job.”

leaders that received little or no leadership training in seminary is at the heart of this risk.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to lacking leadership training, these pastors also lack training in models of ministry that are sustainable over the long-term.<sup>33</sup>

### *The Need for Spiritual Formation*

If learning-in-community serves to strengthen pastoral leadership capabilities, it is also crucial for deep spiritual formation, according to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic work on discipleship, *Life Together*. According to Bonhoeffer, spiritual formation needs Christian community.<sup>34</sup> Steven Garber has said that a seamless integration of "liturgy, learning, and labor" is at the center of a life that forms people and their pastors spiritually.<sup>35</sup> The Austin Seminary study also asserts the critical role of community for pastors. It was an aide in their continuing professional learning as well as in their spiritual formation.<sup>36</sup>

### **Problem and Purpose Statements**

One of the most disconcerting experiences that newly ordained pastors can have is to discover that despite their newly minted seminary degree, they still need training.<sup>37</sup> In 2005 the Alban Institute of Herndon, Virginia, was invited by the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

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<sup>32</sup> Kristen Stewart, "Keeping Your Pastor: An Emerging Challenge," *Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences*, Oakland City University 13, no. 3 (2009): 123. "Many ministers bring wonderful gifts and talents, as well as unique life experiences, to their ministry. Yet, far too often the skills that are required to run a small not-for-profit business are not taught in the educational institutions that are licensing and ordaining ministers."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954). This Bonhoeffer's purpose in the entire volume, to demonstrate that the life in Christ, was meant to be "life together."

<sup>35</sup> Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior*, Expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 197.

<sup>36</sup> Austin Presbyterian Seminary, 4. I do not know how to correct this citation in EndNote, which is from the Austin Presbyterian Seminary Study Report....

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. "...research strongly suggests a profound disconnect between the reality of day-to-day ministry and what is traditionally taught in preparation for entering the field of ministry."

to observe its Transition into Ministry initiative and to “share early discoveries with religious leaders.”<sup>38</sup> In the Alban Institute’s Special Report, “Becoming a Pastor: Reflections on the Transition into Ministry,” James P. Wind and David J. Wood recognized

...significant discoveries that can lay the groundwork for long-term, systemic change in the way people are prepared for practical pastoral leadership.... At its core this initiative seeks to reshape the preparation of Protestant pastors by supplementing the seminary training received in the M.Div. program with a focused apprenticeship in a “community of practice.” Based on the assumption that pastors will be better prepared to lead congregations when they have had the opportunity to become reflective participants in a local community of practice, these programs seek to counter a two-centuries-long trend of viewing pastoral preparation as something that is largely completed upon graduating from seminary.<sup>39</sup>

According to Wind and Wood, another kind of learning is needed after seminary; opportunities oriented toward experiential and practical learning in community, and rich in reflection.<sup>40</sup> In *Keeping Your Pastor: An Emerging Challenge*, Kristen Stewart notes that after three to four years of intensive seminary education in biblical languages and history, hermeneutics and homiletics, counseling and mission, men and women are entering vocational ministry thinking that they are experts, only to find themselves in a dark and frightening ocean far from shore.<sup>41</sup> Though the resulting challenge has the potential to

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<sup>38</sup> James P. and David J. Wind, *Becoming a Pastor: Reflections on the Transition into Ministry* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 13-15. Then TiM Report notes the need to strongly rebut the assumption that seminary is all the preparation a pastor needs to enter ministry. The initiative developed programs that “seek to counter a two centuries-long trend of viewing pastoral preparation as something that is largely completed upon graduating from seminary.”

<sup>41</sup> Stewart: 125. Stewart’s essay notes that, “research strongly suggests a profound disconnect between the reality of day-to-day ministry and what is traditionally taught in preparation for entering the field of ministry. Consequently, when ministers are unprepared for a large portion of their jobs, they often become overwhelmed, which, in turn, can then lead to high dropout rates.

foster deep learning,<sup>42</sup> without mature, personal guidance, those entering ministry post-seminary will struggle in world that they thought they understood.<sup>43</sup> Instead of being competent and confident servant-leaders, seminary graduates are discovering that they have only begun their education.<sup>44</sup>

Many pastors had mentors who helped them in coming to a relationship with Christ, in their initial grounding in the faith, and in the discernment of their calling to ministry.<sup>45</sup> However, at the critical juncture of ordination, there was often no mentor in their lives.<sup>46</sup>

The pastor is expected to be a godly spiritual leader and wise teacher of the flock, with a reservoir of wisdom and professional poise. What many don't expect is that the presence of a pastoral mentor is critical to that process.<sup>47</sup> Wind and Wood found that "the mentoring of new pastors by seasoned and excellent pastors is an important dynamic in the

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<sup>42</sup> Tod Allen Farmer, "Utilizing Cognitive Disequilibrium to Prepare Transformational Leaders " *Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences, Oakland City University* 14, no. 2 (2010): 47.

<sup>43</sup> Wind and Wood. Stewart notes, "46% of a ministers' time is required to be spent in managing/administrative functions (McMillion, 2002; Douglas & McNally, 1980; Kune & Donaldson, 1995). Thus, today ministers are the acting CEO of small not-for-profit organizations and are responsible for more than just Sunday morning services and pastoral care. Senior ministers are not only expected to do the day-to-day running of a small business, they also have the responsibilities of preaching, pastoral counseling, teaching, facilitating church growth, strategic planning, creating and holding the vision for the church, visitation and a variety of other congregational expectations. However, training in areas of preaching, Bible and church history make up the majority of class curriculum within seminary training."

<sup>44</sup> Wind, 14. "How one learns ministry in these early years is as important as what one learns. ... If the initial experience of being a novice is generative, it sets the stage for embracing the need for learning that one encounters in the course of a lifetime of ministry."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. "...every entering pastor is being pressured to learn more and integrate more different kinds of knowledge than ever before. At the very same time, the once thick religious subcultures that naturally passed on traditions of ministry and pastoral practice and supported new clergy as they assumed their roles lost a great deal of their formative power as the 20th century progressed."

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. "In America's history...[p]arsonages were primary incubators where pastors' sons and other apprentices carefully observed a minister's practice and absorbed the clerical way of life, both in the study and at the dinner table." Wood and Wind observe that through the increase of diverse pathways into ministry, cultural diversity and the higher educational models of learning that the personal element in this system of mentoring and preparation was lost.

<sup>47</sup> Stewart: 125. "Seasoned practitioners who have learned to communicate to others the wisdom they have gained through practice are crucial catalysts in creating the conditions for reflective immersion. The strength or relative weakness of a TiM program often turns on the effectiveness of mentoring pastors."

formation of pastoral identity.”<sup>48</sup> However, lacking any sort of mentoring process, the transition “can be abrupt, untutored, and haphazard. As a result, beginning pastors tend to feel isolated and unprepared, [and lack] crucial support and guidance when they most need it,” according to Wind and Wood’s findings.<sup>49</sup> The pressures of leadership and management of the church organization, programs, and staff can consume nearly half of the pastor’s time. The time and energy required to fulfill those duties often results in greater pressure on his teaching, preaching and pastoral responsibilities, and the pastor’s family life is often impacted as well.<sup>50</sup>

Pastors often experience significant isolation as they leave seminary and enter the ministry.<sup>51</sup> The complaint of King David in Psalm 142:4 could be from the lips of any the young servants of the kingdom these authors describe:

Look to the right and see:  
there is none who takes notice of me;  
no refuge remains to me;  
no one cares for my soul.

The transition into parish ministry leadership is lonely and often provided for inadequately. Without pastor-mentors to guide them and to provide a community of peers for spiritual formation, new pastors, their ministries, and their families suffer.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how emerging pastoral leaders develop in spiritual formation through structured peer relationships.

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>49</sup> Wind and Wood, 29.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

### **Research Questions**

1. What structured peer relationships did emerging pastoral leaders participate in after their pre-ministry preparation?
2. What spiritual formation did emerging pastoral leaders experience in structured peer relationships after their pre-ministry preparation?
3. What mentoring did emerging pastoral leaders experience through structured peer relationships after their pre-ministry preparation?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study should prove to be important for future the fruitfulness of the American church. Emerging pastoral leaders in the America are divided generationally and philosophically from the prior generation of leaders and models that shaped the church. As a consequence, conservative evangelical denominations are particularly at risk of being sidelined unless they engage in new learning that enables them to adapt to the changes in the world around them.

It is anticipated that this study will identify ways to develop mentoring skills that are best suited to the practices of modern vocational ministry. This study assumes that mentoring is distinct from the learning methodologies of the graduate theological seminary, or of the classroom in general.

It is hoped that this study will encourage many pastors to develop mentoring and leadership modeling practices. These practices, in turn, could develop healthy ministry systems within their parishes or organizations.

### Definition of Terms Used in this Study

**Apprenticeship:** a holistic learning relationship between an older, more experienced ministry practitioner, and a younger, less experienced ministry practitioner to engender healthy ministry practices.

**Adult learning:** (also andragogy) seeks to focus specifically on how adults learn; how they make meaning, reorganize prior learning, and relearn.<sup>52</sup>

**Coaching:** a participatory, in-practice learning process that includes teaching, honing skills, training, or instructing, often in the manner of the “player-coach” in baseball.

**Cognitive Disequilibrium:** occurs when there is a discrepancy between two beliefs, two actions, or both. This is the mental space where people act to resolve conflict and discrepancies. The implication is that an appropriate amount of disequilibrium will lead to learning and then to changed behavior and thought patterns, which in turn will lead to further changes in behavior.

**Communities of Practice:** communities formed by people engaged in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor.

**Emerging Adulthood:** the time period between adolescence and adulthood, now expanded to include ages 18-30; a characteristic of “Millennials” also informally “twenty-somethings.”

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<sup>52</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, Rosemary S. Caffarella, and Lisa M. Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd Edition (Jossey-Bass, 2006).

**Emerging Pastoral Leaders:** pastoral leaders who have completed their educational preparation, entered vocational ministry, and adapted to its practical realities. For the purposes of this study, this term refers to leaders who are in sole or senior pastoral roles, and who have experience a season of reflection and maturation.

**Experiential Learning:** emphasizes the central role that experience plays in the learning process, as differentiated from cognitive learning theories, which tend to emphasize cognition over affect, and from behavioral learning theories that deny any role for subjective experience in the learning process.

**Hero Leader:** a leader who exercises a more autocratic, command and control style of leadership, wherein the most highly valued behaviors involve setting or casting a vision, selling the vision, and subsequently keeping everyone motivated to carry out the vision. This approach is in contrast to the view that leadership is “influencing the community to face its problems.”

**Mentor:** a person who is experienced in their field, who relates to their protégé as a trusted adviser and friend, and who trains and counsels the protégé in their shared vocation in a life-on-life manner.

**Mentorship:** the intentional development of a relationship between an older, more experienced guide and teacher, the Mentor, with a younger less experienced learner, the Protégé, in a life-on-life, learning-in-practice context.



**Protégé:** A person who is a novice receiving mentoring. Although the term “mentee” occurs increasingly in popular usage, thus avoiding the sense of subservience, scholarly literature has retained the traditional usage.<sup>53</sup>

**Reflective Immersion:** the provision of structures and processes that allow new pastors to learn from the immersive nature of first-call situations.<sup>54</sup>

**SPE Groups:** Cohorts of pastors that were formed under the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) initiative of the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

**Spiritual formation:** refers in this study to the inner, spiritual transformation process of a follower of Jesus Christ. This emphasis on transformation is in addition to the common view of discipleship as consisting of the mastery of biblical knowledge, habits of prayer and Bible study, worship attendance, and discovery of spiritual gifts.

**Structured Peer Relationships/Group:** among pastors this is a group of six to eight peers who have committed to one another, to meet together for the purpose of mutual encouragement and spiritual growth.

**Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE):** The name of an initiative of the Lilly Endowment, Inc. It provided grants totaling \$84 million dollars to 63 organizations to study what factors cause ministers to remain spiritually alive and thriving in their ministries.

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<sup>53</sup> Stewart: 122.

<sup>54</sup> Wind and Wood, 21.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study purposed to explore how emerging pastoral leaders develop in spiritual formation through structured peer relationships. In order to develop an understanding of how spiritual formation occurs in the rising generation of pastoral leaders, four areas of literature were reviewed. The biblical literature provides a foundational understanding, a theological framework, and examines the relational structures in which evidence of spiritual formation occurred. Literature in the area of spiritual formation shows the church's subsequent reflection on the process in light of the biblical literature. The literature on structured peer relationships is a subset of the more general topic of mentoring. The literature on emerging adults describes the particular challenges and needs of spiritual formation among the next generation of pastors as they move into primary leadership roles in the church.

### **Biblical Literature on Spiritual Formation**

The researcher reviewed biblical passages that provide a biblical-theological framework<sup>55</sup> for spiritual formation, mentorship, and relational learning structures. The scope of the study limited the examination of biblical literature to certain key narratives that evidence a significant level of concern for the spiritual formation and mentoring of

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<sup>55</sup> The biblical-theological framework is the approach to biblical doctrine that understands that theology was revealed both through the narrative of Scripture and that the narratives, themselves were the means whereby God revealed his truth

the next generation. The criteria for choosing passages were situations in which: a) intentional training and modeling was indicated, b) personal relationship supplied the training context (usually between an older, more experienced spiritual leader and a younger, less experienced leader), c) concern existed for preparing and teaching the next generation, specifically the development of younger rising leaders. All the passages selected are narratives. Some of the chosen passages show an intersection between the mentors' written teachings, scripture, and their style of mentoring, which further weighted its value. The biblical literature was foundational to the review of spiritual formation and mentorship in particular, providing a framework from which to approach emerging adulthood in general.<sup>56</sup>

It is important to establish a biblical baseline for Christian spiritual formation. Accordingly, the approach to spiritual formation will be derived from the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The biblical literature asserts itself as the divine and authentic communication from God to man, an epistemological parting of the curtain at the border of the invisible world. Jesus said in Matthew 5, "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."<sup>57</sup> Again in Matthew 24, Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."<sup>58</sup>

Therefore it is necessary to read the biblical paradigms of spiritual formation, closely and carefully, noting how spiritual formation takes place in the lives of the people

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<sup>56</sup> With respect to the biblical literature, the term is applied in a non-technical sense.

<sup>57</sup> Matthew 5:18

<sup>58</sup> Matthew 24:35. The familiar but staggering words of Jesus are a clear demonstration of the perspective of the biblical narrative.

of God. Approaching the Bible faithfully means being sensitive to its historical timeframe as well as to the culture that was shaped by biblical revelation, and being careful not to read through our Western, pragmatic lenses.<sup>59</sup>

This sensitivity and the discovery process is best aided by a biblical-theological approach to scripture, where real-life, God-directed events recorded in the Bible not only taught theological truth, but also demonstrated it. The demonstration and the teaching often included God-directed theological reflection upon the events. A biblical-theological framework enhances the ability to discern that theological truth. The consequent spiritual formation it produces is conveyed, and shaped by, the relational context in which it occurs.<sup>60</sup> Since a biblical-theological framework presumes a progressively unfolding framework, the biblical literature is reviewed chronologically.

### *Moses and Joshua*

Mentor-like relationships<sup>61</sup> in which spiritual formation takes place occur throughout the biblical narrative. However, only a few provide a level of detail and

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<sup>59</sup> J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988). Clinton's thesis is that there are recognizable patterns and seasons of spiritual growth and development in the lives of biblical figures which may be discerned and attended to, but that the biblical figures did not control the processes, God did. David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your C Q to Engage Our Multicultural World*, Youth, Family, and Culture Series. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009). Livermore asserts that our cultural biases make us unconscious of the fact that they are biases. We think that the way we see things is the way everyone sees them.

<sup>60</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," Shane Rosenthal for Reformation Ink, <http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/gvbiblical.htm> (accessed July 8 2010). Vos's premise was that God's revelation is the story — in this manner he designed the OT feasts, for instance, to picture, to teach about, and to convey his grace. Embedded in them is truth, doctrine, gospel, that is made accessible through, and in the context of, the sacrifice in which the worshiper participated around the fellowship of the table.

<sup>61</sup> Belle Rose Ragins and Kathy E. Kram, *The Handbook of Mentoring at Work: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007), 2-3. Ragins and Kram note, "While our interest in mentoring is relatively young, mentoring is an ancient archetype originating in Greek mythology. A figure in Homer's *Odyssey*,

significance that is useful for understanding the process of spiritual formation in the relationship. The narratives of the Pentateuch reveal a close and protracted relationship between Moses and Joshua the son of Nun in a unique and paradigmatic, if unrepeatable, setting in which the relationship of God with Israel is established, characterized, and regulated for the purpose of creating a people “holy to the Lord.”<sup>62</sup>

Behind the relationship of Moses and Joshua are Moses’ personal story and a prior relationship. Scripture provides a picture of Moses as a hothead and premeditated murderer.<sup>63</sup> Much later, Moses is described as a “meek”<sup>64</sup> man, that is, as one who had been made gentle. This transformation is one about which we have no data beyond the bare facts of his marrying, beginning to have a family, and shepherding sheep in the household of his father-in-law Jethro.<sup>65</sup> The outcome was that Moses was a different man. It was he, a man transformed, who became Joshua’s mentor.

The relationship between Moses and Joshua can be characterized as a spiritually formative one. The reader observes that the first time Joshua is mentioned is when he was chosen by Moses to take the role of commander of the army of Israel in a battle against

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Mentor was a wise and faithful advisor entrusted to protect Odysseus’s son, Telemachus, while Odysseus sailed against Troy. It is interesting to note that the original mentoring archetype embodied both male and female attributes. Mentor was a man, but Athena, the female goddess of wisdom, assumed his form in order to guide, teach, and protect young Telemachus. This archetype offers provocative insights into the meaning of mentoring as a relationship that transcends time, gender, and culture. Moreover, while the roots of mentoring can be traced to mythology, mentoring is no myth; it is a very real relationship that has been an integral part of social life and the world of work for thousands of years.”

<sup>62</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6 “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

<sup>63</sup> Exodus 2:11-14.

<sup>64</sup> Numbers 12:3 “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.”

<sup>65</sup> Exodus 2:16-3:2.

Amalek.<sup>66</sup> Evidently, Joshua was a young man, perhaps in his early twenties. He thereafter became Moses' assistant, or מִשְׁרָתָן.<sup>67</sup> In the book of Exodus, Moses received the Law "by the finger of God."<sup>68</sup> Joshua was present when Moses met face to face with God in the tent of meeting,<sup>69</sup> and he lingered there after Moses had departed.<sup>70</sup> From the narrative and the implication of Joshua's role as Moses' assistant, it appears that they were together day in and day out. Apparently it was part of Joshua's duty to shadow Moses, and he would have been in a position to observe Moses in intimate detail.

The context in which Joshua was formed spiritually is noteworthy. He served as right hand man to Moses, within a community of at least two million people, traveling in a military formation and encampment, led through the desert by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, with a diet of manna provided by God, and an ongoing dialogue of instructions and laws from God to Moses.<sup>71</sup> This is a unique and unrepeatable learning context in which to have one's spiritual formation take place. What can be observed about this environment is that it was controlled and directed by God, and was used to teach

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<sup>66</sup> Exodus 17:9-10 "So Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.' So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.' Verse 12, "And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword."

<sup>67</sup> from שִׁרְתָּ vb. Pi. minister, serve. Used of ministerial service (opp. menial, עֲבָד): a. higher domestic service: Joseph, Elisha's chief servant, royal domestics, Abishag. b. of royal officers (late). c. Joshua as chief assistant to Moses, Elisha to Elijah. From A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (abridged) Based on A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907. Digitized and abridged as a part of the Princeton Theological Seminary Hebrew Lexicon Project under the direction of Dr. J. M. Roberts. Used by permission. Electronic text corrected, formatted, and hypertexted by OakTree Software, Inc. This electronic adaptation ©2001 OakTree Software, Inc. Version 3.3 Accordance Citation.

<sup>68</sup> Exodus 31:18 "And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God."

<sup>69</sup> Exodus 33:11 "Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent."

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> From the narrative of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Moses, Joshua, and the entire community a range of truths about God. God revealed himself to Moses as the creator and gracious sustainer. In the Exodus, God revealed himself as redeemer and sovereign ruler over all, but in a unique relationship with Israel, his chosen people through whom he would bless the world.

In prefacing God's ten words, Moses says to his people, "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'"<sup>72</sup> When God brought Israel out of Egypt and into the desert in preparation to enter the Promised Land, a powerful and spiritually formative environment was constituted in which lesson after lesson of faith was enacted. Throughout the process, Joshua was present. The text reveals that God was teaching the entire nation not only through his words, but also through Moses, a man on display with all of his strengths and weaknesses, failures and victories, faith and unbelief. In this way God made Moses a model. As is common throughout scripture's unblinking honesty about the imperfections of the key characters, it is evident that God does not intend his people to emulate everything Moses did.

What is important for this research is to note that Joshua was present with Moses from early on in this process. Moses' relationship to Joshua was prominent. It figured significantly, as the Hebrew term *מִשְׁתָּן*, or "assistant" implies.<sup>73</sup> The nature of this relationship is implied by the Hebrew term: it is not that of a mere errand runner. Joshua was a trusted, chief assistant to Moses. His position was not unlike the stature of Joseph under Pharaoh. Joseph was a servant of Pharaoh, but his was the highest position in the

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<sup>72</sup> Exodus 20:1-2

<sup>73</sup> Exodus 24:12; Numbers 11:28; Joshua 1:1

nation under the monarch himself. Joshua's exemplary conduct and the great trust placed in him as he served in this important role are recorded in the book of Joshua. The narrative gives glimpses of the results of his long-term relationship with his mentor Moses. Joshua became a leader of strong faith, great military prowess, and godly character after succeeding Moses as the leader of Israel.<sup>74</sup>

### *Elijah and Elisha*

Elijah and Elisha were in a similar mentor-protégé relationship. Elisha ministered to Elijah, he assisted him in the same way Joshua assisted Moses, as is indicated by the use of the same term, שרת.<sup>75</sup> Elijah was directed to anoint Elisha as his successor in the role of prophet to Israel. The relationship between them began, and Elisha's life changed, when Elisha was plowing in a field. Elijah came up to him, threw his own cloak on Elisha's shoulders, and kept on walking. The act symbolized the mantle of his prophetic office<sup>76</sup> and Elisha ran after Elijah to ask if he could say goodbye to his parents, recognizing that he had been called to a new way of life.<sup>77</sup>

Since Elisha understood that he now had a new calling, he began to walk with Elijah in the course of his prophetic ministry. From the time of Elisha's call until the time of Elijah's departure he observed and ministered to Elijah as his chief assistant. Elisha's

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<sup>74</sup> Evidence of Joshua's long obedience comes at the end of his life as he speaks these words: "And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15

<sup>75</sup> 1 Kings 19:21.

<sup>76</sup> 1 Kings 19:19.

<sup>77</sup> 1 Kings 19:20,21.



determination to follow and serve his mentor until they were parted by the Lord is evident right up until Elijah's time on earth drew to a close:

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.<sup>78</sup>

Elisha is adamant that he will not leave Elijah's side until the end.<sup>79</sup> This determination is perhaps a window into his practice from the time he left his old way of life. Because of his habit and his insistence, Elisha is present at Elijah's departure and witnesses a theophany—a manifestation of the visible presence of the Godhead. Not only is Elisha being apprenticed as the successor to Elijah, this relationship and all that he witnessed is a classic example of the biblical environment in which spiritual formation takes place. Under his mentor, Elisha walked through a series of events, which constituted his apprenticeship.

Scripture does not specifically note the chronological details of Elisha's apprenticeship but the events it does record were dramatic. Elijah and Elisha's mentor-protégé relationship began during the long reign of Ahab, after Elijah fled from Jezebel. It ended only when Elisha saw Elijah taken up to heaven in the whirlwind.<sup>80</sup> During this time Elisha was in a position to learn by the word as well as by the example and model of Elijah. If he was present, observing and participating as Elijah's assistant during all the events of Ahab's reign from 1 Kings 20 - 2 Kings 2:1, Elisha's was an extraordinary apprenticeship.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> 2 Kings 2:1-2.

<sup>79</sup> 2 Kings 2:4-12.

<sup>80</sup> 2 Kings 2:11.

<sup>81</sup> His assistant role would then have spanned the faith lessons of God's repeated deliverances of the wicked King Ahab in his wars with Syria and Ben-Hadad. This would have included the defeat of Syria by God's word, using 7,232 men against the Syrian horde; the second defeat where 100,000 fell and 27,000 more by

Hundreds of small and great unrecorded conversations are subtly hinted at in the narrative: “And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them.”<sup>82</sup> As the two companions and fellow observers of the mighty saving acts of God walked and talked, God himself effected the transition of authority from Elijah to Elisha. God then confirmed Elisha’s authority by suspending the laws of physics to part the waters of the Jordan.

Elisha’s subsequent faithfulness as God’s prophet during the period of the divided kingdom of Israel attests to the fruitfulness of his apprenticeship with Elijah, and to God’s answer to his request for a double portion of the Spirit.<sup>83</sup> There is a discernable and repeated pattern of life-on-life learning through close, protracted interaction in the scriptures. This pattern ensured direct, personal witness of the life and ministry of the mentor and the genuineness of his walk with God. Additional elements include a series of God-directed events through which the faith and maturation of the protégé is formed, and an expectation that the protégé would take up the mantle of the mentor at the end of the process. The same process is also evident in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ with his disciples.

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the direct hand of God in the collapse of the city wall of Aphek; the sordid tale of Naboth's murder for his land by the wicked scheme of Jezebel, her doom foretold and fulfilled. He would have witnessed Ahab's surprise repentance. As those among the company of the prophets it is possible that they both were also aware of the account of the false prophets in Ahab's court during Jehoshaphat's bid for alliance with Israel against Ramoth-gilead. In this context they would also have been aware of Micaiah's faithfulness, and Jehoshaphat's demise, for until Ahab's death, Elijah's prophetic role was ongoing.

<sup>82</sup> 2 Kings 2:11.

<sup>83</sup> 2 Kings 2:9-11.

*Jesus and the Disciples*

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine every setting in which Jesus employed his methods for the training and spiritual formation of his disciples. Among the representative examples, one can be found in the simple way Jesus called his disciples. Mark's gospel says that Jesus called the twelve disciples to "be with him."<sup>84</sup> The twelve were with Jesus, not merely observing him. They were participants with him reclining at the table, so they did not merely see him eat and drink. They ate and drank with him.<sup>85</sup> They did not merely see where he slept and prayed, they slept where he slept and learned to pray by watching him pray, and then asking him to teach them to pray.<sup>86</sup> The learning environment that the disciples experienced with Jesus was the ebb and flow of each day. They rose, they prayed, they ate, and they walked. Often, they ate with others, and it was in this context of hospitality that Jesus taught them.<sup>87</sup> Jesus both presented truth and modeled truth-telling as he disputed, challenged, and dialogued with sincere seekers and those who opposed him. In the home of Matthew the tax collector, this typical exchange occurred:

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Mark 3:14 "And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach."

<sup>85</sup> Matthew 9:10 "And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples."

<sup>86</sup> Luke 11:1 "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'"

<sup>87</sup> Mark 2:15 "And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him." Matthew 8:24 "And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep." Matthew 26:40 "And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping." Luke 11:1 "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'"

<sup>88</sup> Matthew 9:11-13.

The setting is a dinner party hosted by a new follower of Jesus—so new, in fact, that one might not be able to ascertain that he is a believer. There are numerous other guests, including tax collectors and sinners, who were creating disequilibrium for the disciples and for the Pharisees. The Pharisees were almost certainly onlookers, not table guests, since they so scornfully objected to the company Jesus was keeping. Jesus is welcoming and teaching tax collectors and sinners, and demonstrating grace towards them. As he does so, he is teaching the disciples and modeling for them. Interestingly, the Pharisees are central to the learning experience Jesus created for the disciples. His response to the Pharisees' question, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" drives home a powerful truth: people who are (spiritually) well don't need a doctor. The fact that the Pharisees did not think they needed a doctor for their souls brought the lesson to a sharp point.

This is an example of the genius of Jesus' teaching method. It is useful to observe the components in this setting. First, there is the agitation of the Pharisees, which Jesus was producing in them due to his popularity<sup>89</sup> and his disturbing practices. There is also probable anxiety among the tax collectors and sinners, produced by the scornful disapproval of the Pharisees. There is curiosity and possibly anxiety among the disciples over both Jesus' behavior and the Pharisees' disapproval. In this way, Jesus created a vibrant, real-life learning environment in which to form the disciples spiritually.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> John 12:17-19 "The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.'"

<sup>90</sup> In contemporary educational theory this dynamic is called cognitive disequilibrium. Jesus was creating disequilibrium as a powerful means of teaching.

The learning environment created by Jesus to form the spiritual core of the twelve disciples was one-of-a-kind. It was not a classroom in the way we conceive of it. The settings were varied and changed constantly, but Jesus' used them all as aids to spiritual training and mentoring. Jesus, with the twelve disciples, encountered people as they lived life and plied their trades.<sup>91</sup> In every place he went, he modeled what he taught by the way he lived, whom he welcomed, whom he challenged, those with whom he was gentle, and those he rebuked. His was a wholistic, life-on-life approach to the spiritual formation and mentoring the twelve disciples.

Another example of mentoring and training is the way Jesus taught his disciples in the midst of a crowd. Afterward, he gathered them privately and helped them process what had happened. There he explained, corrected, taught, answered questions, and gave the meaning of what had happened. Additional examples of Jesus' mentoring and training practices are found in Mark 10. First is the instance of the Pharisees questioning Jesus regarding divorce.<sup>92</sup> After answering and correcting them, the narrative continues, saying, "And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter."<sup>93</sup> Jesus elucidated his teaching for the twelve disciples, who were presumably now alone with him in the privacy of the house where they were staying. It is significant that the exchange between the

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<sup>91</sup> Mark 10:32 "And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him...." Mark 2:23 "One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain." Mark 14:3 "And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head." Following this act, Jesus taught all those who were present. Luke 19:5 "And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

<sup>92</sup> Luke 5:1,2 "On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets."

<sup>93</sup> Mark 10:1-12.

Pharisees and Jesus disturbed the disciples,<sup>94</sup> because that was the impetus for their question. Their disequilibrium served to make them teachable, and provided constant opportunities for Jesus to instruct them.

Mark's narrative continues with a number of people bringing their little children to Jesus for a blessing.<sup>95</sup> The disciples must have thought this was beneath Jesus, because the text says they rebuked the people in the crowds<sup>96</sup> who were bringing their children. Counter to what the disciples expected, Jesus corrected them, and taught them about the true nature of the kingdom of God. As he taught, he demonstrated what he was saying by taking the children into his arms and blessing them. This presumably happened in the open air, with a crowd around; it was not a lecture, but a live event.

The narrative continues by relating the story of the exchanges between Jesus and the rich young ruler, and Jesus and the disciples afterward.<sup>97</sup> Mark begins his record of the interview with the young man calling Jesus "Good Teacher,"<sup>98</sup> and asking Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life.<sup>99</sup> As he often did, Jesus answered his questioner with a question of his own: "Why do you call me good?"<sup>100</sup> Jesus then told the young man to keep the commandments; the young man replied that he had done so. When Jesus told him to sell everything he owned, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow him, the young ruler went away. Jesus' answer brought him disappointment and exposed the young man's true

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<sup>94</sup> Mark 10:10.

<sup>95</sup> Matt 19:10 "The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." One does not have to use a great deal of imagination to catch the incredulous tone in the disciples response.

<sup>96</sup> Mark 10:13-16.

<sup>97</sup> "They were bringing children to him that he might touch them" in Mark 10:13 has as its antecedent Mark 10:1 "and crowds gathered to him again."

<sup>98</sup> Mark 10:17-31.

<sup>99</sup> In Matthew's parallel he asks Jesus "what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Matthew 19:16.

<sup>100</sup> Mark 10:17.

priorities. Mark records that Jesus looked around at the disciples, and declared, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”<sup>101</sup> This rattled the disciples who asked, “Then who can be saved?”<sup>102</sup>

Throughout these examples it is evident that the learning environment Jesus employed was not theoretical. Jesus taught the disciples spiritual truths and imparted knowledge, but he also strongly challenged their attitudes and prejudices. Jesus went beyond simply relating events in his life and using them as teaching examples; he taught them in the midst of ministry events. Jesus’ spiritual formation of the disciples involved regular post-event reflection to help them interpret what they had seen and heard. In other instances he prepared the disciples in advance for a future event that would be difficult or puzzling.<sup>103</sup> He explained the parables before his resurrection,<sup>104</sup> and opened their minds and hearts so they could understand afterward.<sup>105</sup> What all the above examples indicate is that Jesus was continually present with the disciples, continually processing with them, continually challenging them, and continually teaching them as he went about ministering and preaching the gospel in various locales.

Near the end of his time with the disciples, in the upper room, Jesus marked a transition in his relationship with them. He said,

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<sup>101</sup> Mark 10:23.

<sup>102</sup> Mark 10:26.

<sup>103</sup> Mark 10:32-34; Matthew 20:17-19; Luke 18:31 “And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”

<sup>104</sup> Mark 4:11 “And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables” Also in its parallels in the synoptics, Jesus explains the parable to them.

<sup>105</sup> Luke 24:45 “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.<sup>106</sup>

We would say today that Jesus' gave the disciples spiritual formation training in real time. This is the same method used by Moses and Elijah. Jesus uniqueness as the God-man means that his practices confirmed the paradigm of spiritual formation and mentoring while adding profound divine weight to it.

### *The Ministry of the Apostle Paul*

Throughout Paul's ministry, in each of his missionary journeys, he had a team of companion-workers.<sup>107</sup> Exceptions to this practice were rare and temporary.<sup>108</sup> Early in Paul's ministry there was a team of ministers in Antioch that included "prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."<sup>109</sup> It is quite possible to miss the implications of those relationships for Paul, and to forget not only the particularly personal nature of his companions but also the contributions they made to him and his ministry. Some of these

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<sup>106</sup> John 15:13-15.

<sup>107</sup> Acts 13:13 "Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia." Acts 16:3 "Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." Acts 16:10 "And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." Acts 17:4 "And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. 1 Thessalonians 1:1 "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace." 2 Tim 4:9 "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments."

<sup>108</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 317, 318.

<sup>109</sup> Acts 13:1.



companions often remain completely in the background. But more can be discerned about a few of Paul's other companions, such as Luke. The Gospel of Luke clearly demonstrates that Luke was not only a friend to Paul but also a man of keen theological insight, depth, and wisdom.

## Paul and Luke

The New Testament record does not afford an example of Luke's personal discourse—we have no dialog or words quoted from his own mouth—and yet he was more than simply the silent gospel chronicler. He was also Paul's personal companion.<sup>110</sup> Paul was the gospel preacher and Apostle to the Gentiles.<sup>111</sup> But Luke's account also indirectly sheds important light on his mentor-protégé relationship with Paul.

What can one observe about the nature of their relationship? From the sheer weight of Paul's contribution to the New Testament canon and the depth of his theological reflection and teaching, one may assume that Paul was the mentor in the relationship.

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<sup>110</sup> Stott observes that In Acts 20:2-6 "Luke interrupts his narrative in order to tell us who Paul's travelling companions were. It is noteworthy that Paul hardly ever travelled alone, and that when he was alone, he expressed his longing for human companionship, for example in Athens and in his final Roman imprisonment. That he favoured team work is specially clear during his missionary journeys. On his first he was accompanied by Barnabas and John Mark (until the latter defected), on his second by Silas and later Timothy, then Luke, and now at the end of his third Luke supplies his readers with a list of Paul's friends. He was accompanied by Sopater (perhaps the same as the Sosipater who in Romans 16:21 is called one of Paul's 'relatives') son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus (19:29; 27:2) and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe (probably the same as in 19:29, where one reading makes only Aristarchus a Macedonian, not Gaius), Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. Trophimus came from Ephesus; perhaps Tychicus did also." 317, 318

<sup>111</sup> Acts 16:10 "And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia..." this is the first of the so-called "we sections" of Acts where the author speaks in the first person plural. He is identified and commonly accepted in New Testament studies as Luke, the author of Luke-Acts. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed., [the Master Reference Collection] (Leicester, Eng. ; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990).

Nevertheless, scholars have discerned a well-developed Lucan theology<sup>112</sup> throughout Luke-Acts. Luke's writing shows high intelligence, careful investigative scholarship,<sup>113</sup> thematic biblical-theological organization, and insight into the universal, missiological intent of the gospel.<sup>114</sup> The degree to which Luke also mentored Paul is difficult to determine. But it is evident that Luke matured to the point of making his own contribution to the New Testament, and his mature theological reflections are significant for the reasons cited above. In particular it is significant to note the way his biblical-theological insight guided the organization of Luke-Acts, and his grasp of the gospel mission is evident.<sup>115</sup> Hendriksen observes that the unique material in just the first three chapters of Luke "amount to almost one-seventh of the total contents of Luke's gospel,"<sup>116</sup> and that there is much more besides this.<sup>117</sup> As a physician,<sup>118</sup> he was among the educated class of his day, as was Paul.<sup>119</sup>

When viewed through the lens of God's providence, Luke was a uniquely qualified companion. He worked alongside Paul not only as a theologian,<sup>120</sup> but also as a

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<sup>112</sup> The "we sections" of Acts are 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

<sup>113</sup> Conzelmann's specific conclusions are widely and appropriately critiqued, but scholars agree that there is a distinct Lucan Theology. The author does not conclude from this fact that Pauline, Lucan, Petrine or any other theology constitute conflicting theologies within the New Testament. See also Guthrie, 239-243.

<sup>114</sup> Luke 1:1-3 "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." Guthrie, 102-103; *ibid.* According to Guthrie, Luke shows unique theological insight in the way he references OT passages such as Isaiah to demonstrate the stories of Jesus' interaction with non-Jews. Also see Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 125-126. Van Gelder reminds us that, "The very existence of the church in the world creates a missionary condition."

<sup>115</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, New Testament Commentary / William Hendriksen. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 17.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-21

<sup>118</sup> Guthrie, 118.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Hendriksen, 45.

caregiver.<sup>121</sup> Luke started traveling with Paul in Troas, and then accompanied him to Philippi.<sup>122</sup> It is important to note that Luke's presence and his personal characteristics were significant to Paul. Examining the narrative leads one to posit that Paul's learned companion enjoyed a rich peer relationship with him and that within this relationship both Paul and Luke were learning as they traveled together on the missionary journeys of Acts. It seems reasonable that the mentoring relationship would have gradually progressed from Luke as protégé to Luke as increasingly able peer and colleague.

### **Paul and Titus**

The mutuality of a mentor-protégé relationship is also present in Paul's relationship with Titus. Paul says,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.<sup>123</sup>

Why does Paul say that he was comforted? Part of the reason is because of Titus. Paul is able to comfort others because he has been comforted in his afflictions. After great suffering, he is now writing to say, "We do not lose heart." One strong reason Paul gives is the "but God," of 2 Corinthians 7: "But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he

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<sup>121</sup> Guthrie, 119.

<sup>122</sup> Acts 16:11 "So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis"

<sup>123</sup> Acts 17:16-17 "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there." We should not suppose that in every city Paul had full and sufficient advance knowledge that enabled him to interact with the nuances of that culture. Paul's experience of being provoked on Mars hill was a form of disequilibrium, and issued in his ability to contextualize the gospel for the Areopagites.

was comforted by you.”<sup>124</sup> The implication is that Paul enjoyed a relationship with Titus that was mutually beneficial. Paul called Titus his “partner and fellow worker.”<sup>125</sup> Paul the Apostle and mentor received encouragement and strength from Titus, his apostolic delegate and protégé.<sup>126</sup> Mentoring as exemplified by Paul was collegial rather than hierarchical.

### **Paul, Timothy and the Philippian Church**

In chapters one and two of his letter to the Philippian church, Paul lays a gospel foundation: he prays for grace for the church, confesses his trust in God’s grace and his hope for deliverance, and speaks to the reality that a life lived for Christ will involve suffering. After all it is Christ’s example of humility and suffering we are to follow.

Paul next singles out Timothy, whom he hopes to send to the Philippians soon, as a model and example of godly character. If Timothy comes to them, he will surely bring good to them. Paul also singles out Epaphroditus, whom he has sent to deliver his letter, but who also is as a worthy model. Paul then holds up negative models and contrasts them to those who embody gospel living. Finally, Paul offers his own life as a model when he urges the Philippians to “join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”

Paul’s correction of Euodia and Syntyche later in the letter is a study in relational mentoring. One of the remarkable steps Paul takes in this situation is the way he reframes

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<sup>124</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

<sup>125</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:6-7a.

<sup>126</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:23 “As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.”

it: he creates a wider set of dynamics and interests. He puts their conflict in the broader context of the social network of the congregation by making it public—the conflict is not merely between the two of them. He asks his “true companion” (perhaps Epaphroditus) to help the women work things out. In this way Paul sets up a relational mentoring context designed to use this situation to advance their spiritual formation. He also gently, but directly reminds everyone that the interests that hold first place are not their own, but Christ’s, for “the Lord is near.” Several other observations can be made about mentoring from this context.

Paul’s exhortation to Euodia and Syntyche is impressive on two counts. First, Paul gently reproves the quarreling women in a public way in order to use their disagreement as a means of lovingly instructing the whole church. Second, Paul’s description of the mindset and practice of mentoring pointedly contrasts with the bare mastery of a body of knowledge. Paul concludes his exhortation with a personal word, which was read aloud to the church: “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”<sup>127</sup> This verse reveals the holistic nature of Paul’s mentoring model. Paul’s mentoring involved learning, receiving, hearing, seeing, practicing, and even a final element: the benedictory, existentially experienced presence of God, confirming and completing the learning.

For Paul, the mentoring process begins with the breathed out word of God.<sup>128</sup> The word is internalized, then deeper learning takes place as the word is lived out in human relationships. Learning is solidified further through observation of Paul as he models a

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<sup>127</sup> Philippians 4:9

<sup>128</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...”

gospel lifestyle. Learning continues as it is practiced, implying iteration, trial, and error. Finally, the whole process is inhabited and blessed with the shalom of God through the presence of the Spirit himself.

Thus, Paul's letter to the Philippians gives a window into his outlook and practices as a mentor-leader and the way he sought to provide other mentors for the churches he founded. Other glimpses may be gained by looking back further in the letter to the Philippians. In chapter two, Paul names Timothy and Epaphroditus as being especially helpful while he was imprisoned in Rome and unable to visit the newly established churches. Epaphroditus was sent to him by the Philippian church to minister to his needs as a prisoner. Paul, in turn, hoped to send Timothy to them to minister in a unique way to their needs.

It is in this context that Paul's description of Timothy is pertinent. Paul had personally selected Timothy to be with him in his mission.<sup>129</sup> By the time Paul was on his third missionary journey, his trust in Timothy was such that he sent him on ahead to Macedonia while he remained in Ephesus.<sup>130</sup> Later, in his pastoral letters to Timothy, Paul calls Timothy "his child,"<sup>131</sup> and at the end of his life calls him, "my beloved child,"<sup>132</sup> which describes a relationship that is deeper and stronger than mentor and protégé.

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<sup>129</sup> Titus 1:4 "To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."

<sup>130</sup> Acts 16:3 "Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek."

<sup>131</sup> Acts 19:21-22 "Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while."

<sup>132</sup> 1 Timothy 1:18 "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child"

Of Timothy, Paul says, “I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.”<sup>133</sup> For Paul, to send Timothy to the Philippian church (as he hoped to do as soon as he judged it expedient),<sup>134</sup> was to send a man who would be his true representative, who would do for them as Paul would do if he were free to come. Paul is not only completely confident of Timothy’s character and his qualifications, but he also states that Timothy is unique among his associates. For Paul, to say “I have no one like him” is high praise.

Paul’s words form a picture of the relationship he was framing. The picture suggests that Paul expected that good would come of Timothy to going to the Philippians. It is reasonable to infer that Paul thought it was important and valuable for Timothy to merely be present among them. For the Philippians, to spend time with a man with Timothy’s heart would bring the same comfort and encouragement that Paul would bring to them if he were free to visit. Paul intends that the Philippians observe Timothy’s life, be inspired by his example, and ultimately “catch” his values and practices.

One must not overlook the fact that Paul’s greeting in Philippians 1:1-2 includes the overseers and deacons. Paul anticipated delegating Timothy to take a pastoral journey to the Philippian church, but it is evident that Timothy would not be sent to bypass or take the place of the established leadership of the church. It is clear that Paul expected Timothy’s ministry and encouragement to include the overseers and deacons, as well as the congregation. Paul’s greeting to the believers at Philippi, as well as their leaders, included Timothy as co-sender. The connection must not be missed. If Timothy made the journey,

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<sup>133</sup> 2 Timothy 1:2.

<sup>134</sup> Philippians 2:20-21

he would be ministering to the pastors as well as to the congregation, for the overseers were the pastoral shepherds of the church.

Paul's emphasized to the Philippian church that he was confident Timothy's presence would be as valuable to them as his own. Considering Paul's mentoring lifestyle and the confidence he had in his protégés, having Timothy there must have had a broad range of salutary effects on the churches that he founded.

### **The Pauline Matrix in Ephesus: A Summary of the Narrative of Acts 19:1-10**

Paul's method on his third missionary journey was life-on-life teaching in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. We glimpse him "in his workshop," late in his ministry path. He was teaching and practicing what he had learned from Jesus about how to read scripture—what is now known as the redemptive-historical hermeneutic.<sup>135</sup> Acts 19 provides a unique window into Paul's methods of mentoring and spiritual formation. One discovers the heart of Paul's teaching, preaching, and spiritual formation methodology: the application of a redemptive-historical hermeneutic<sup>136</sup> in a radically holistic and multi-level learning environment.

Paul's approach is evident as one observes the matrix of people he ministered to and taught.<sup>137</sup> By this time, Paul himself was a mature missionary-evangelist and leader of

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<sup>135</sup> Stephen C. Baldwin, "The Pastoral-Evangelistic Dialog of Acts 19:1-10 as a Model for Redemptive-Historical Preaching" (Doctor of Ministry Applied Project, Covenant Theological Seminary, 2010), 5-7. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988).

<sup>136</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline", Shane Rosenthal for Reformation Ink, <http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/gvbiblical.htm> (accessed July 8 2010).

<sup>137</sup> Philippians 2:23 "I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me,"



mission teams. His traveling companions and associates included Timothy, Erastus, Gaius, and Aristarchus. The group also included twelve disciples of John the Baptist, several newly converted synagogue members, diverse residents of Asia, locals, and transients Paul and his companions met along the way. The venue was the lecture hall of Tyrannus. The multi-level learning process in which Paul and his companions were engaged simultaneously modeled dialogical gospel presentation, helped the new Jewish believers grow in their faith, evangelized Gentiles and Greeks, and resulted in churches being planted in Asia Minor.<sup>138</sup> The Colossian church is a case in point. It is generally accepted that the existence of the Colossian church is due to the labors of Epaphras.<sup>139</sup> It is also commonly asserted that his conversion and training can be traced back to Ephesus, in the context of this evangelistically rich training environment on the major east-west trade route from Europe to Asia.<sup>140</sup>

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Acts 19:1-10 “And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all.

<sup>138</sup> And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

<sup>139</sup> Colossians 1:7 “just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf”

<sup>140</sup> Derek Thomas, *Acts*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 537.

Paul's continual interaction with this ethnically, religiously, and developmentally divergent suggests he was applying the Old Testament scriptures and all that they said concerning Christ<sup>141</sup> to each group in the same meetings.

Just as Jesus had opened the minds of the disciples to understand and see him in scripture,<sup>142</sup> Paul demonstrates that he has learned to view scripture in the same way. Paul used that framework to shape the theological understanding of his listeners. They developed spiritually as they observed his mature ministry and how the preaching of the gospel transformed all kinds of people.

Paul claims to have enjoyed a similar training period from Jesus.<sup>143</sup> The particular way Paul presents his training—how he learned to read and teach the Bible—indicates that what he received was from the risen Christ. He narrates the story for the church in Galatia,<sup>144</sup> writing that “I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” He wrote that he “did not immediately consult with anyone,” but instead he went away to Arabia, returned to Damascus, and then after

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<sup>141</sup> Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

<sup>142</sup> Luke 24:44-49 “Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”” In this way Jesus taught the disciples how to understand the scriptures. Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 39.

<sup>143</sup> According to Clowney Jesus had “...provided a summary of the gospel and its spread through the nations” and he did this “—all from the Scriptures.”

<sup>144</sup> Galatians 1:15-17 “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” Galatians 2:2 “I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.”

three years spent fifteen days with Peter and Jesus' brother James.<sup>145</sup> Then began a fourteen year period of ministry in Syria and Cilicia.<sup>146</sup>

Across the range of Paul's mentoring practices, the power and priority of relationships is central. Paul's manner of teaching, mentoring, and serving was highly relational with a heavy emphasis on modeling. Titus, Timothy, the deacons and elders of the Philippian church, and the believers mentioned in Acts 19 learned and grew spiritually because they could see a Christlike lifestyle lived out. Paul says, "Brothers, join in imitating<sup>147</sup> me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."<sup>148</sup> Paul's teaching could be experienced because it was being modeled.

The interaction of three principles have been observed in the biblical literature: the relational aspect of spiritual formation, mentor- protégé relationships, and relationships among peers. The examples of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the Disciples, and Paul with Titus, Timothy and the Matrix in Ephesus demonstrate relational contexts in which spiritual formation thrives. Examples that reflect this framework in the literature on spiritual formation follow.

### **Spiritual Formation**

The Pastors Summit Initiative<sup>149</sup>, whose findings and recommendations serve as the foundation to this study, has defined spiritual formation as "the ongoing process of

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<sup>145</sup> Galatians 1:16-20.

<sup>146</sup> Galatians 2:1 "Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me."

<sup>147</sup> Συμμιμηται - from συμμιμητης, ου m: one who joins others as an imitator.

<sup>148</sup> Galatians 1:12-2:1 Philippians 3:17.

<sup>149</sup> "Throughout the past decade Lilly Endowment Inc. (a private philanthropic foundation created to support the causes of religion, education, and community) has funded several projects aimed at exploring the current

maturing as a Christian both personally and interpersonally.” The key to this definition is the phrase “process of maturing.”<sup>150</sup>

An accurate biblical framework for spiritual formation and mentoring has been attempted in the previous section. This framework was critical to the researcher in choosing further literature on spiritual formation. In order to form a robust understanding of spiritual formation, a diverse body of literature was reviewed.

In order to explore literature on spiritual formation, examples were chosen that demonstrated a concern for the process whereby emerging pastoral leaders develop in spiritual formation through mentoring in structured peer relationships. Primary works include those of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Eugene Peterson, Peter Scazzero, Henri Nouwen, and the findings of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Initiative as researched by Bob Burns, Donald Guthrie, and Tasha Chapman. Further corroborating examples were reviewed, including the work of Jerram Barrs. First, an overarching framework will be drawn from the literature, which will be followed by a closer examination of the key literature.

Jerram Barrs’ reflections on Jesus’ paradigm of ministry, spiritual formation and mentoring in *The Heart of Evangelism* provide an excellent starting point to build the

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state of pastoral ministry. One of these initiatives, entitled Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE), provided grants totaling \$84 million dollars to 63 organizations. This initiative is based on the conviction that when churches are led by spiritually strong, thoughtful, able, and imaginative pastors, congregations tend to thrive. The question was: What does it take to sustain pastors in such a way that they will flourish in ministry over the long haul? The SPE initiative was created to find out. The Center for Ministry Leadership & Pastors Summit In 2004, Covenant Theological Seminary, in partnership with two sister institutions, received an SPE grant to develop the Center for Ministry Leadership<sup>3</sup> for the purpose of exploring what helps pastors survive and thrive in ministry. To study this question, the Center developed a specialized forum called the Pastors Summit, designed to draw on the experiences and expertise of seasoned pastors.” Bob Burns, *Pastors Summit: Sustaining Fruitful Ministry* (St. Louis, MO: Covenant Theological Seminary, 2010), 2-3.

<sup>150</sup> Bob Burns, Donald Donald, Tasha Chapman, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming).

framework. Barrs states that when Jesus commissioned his disciples to carry out his mission, “he assured them ‘he would rule the heavenly powers for them’ as they went to the nations . . . and that ‘he rules the nations for his Church, for the sake of the gospel going out to those nations.’”<sup>151</sup> Barrs highlights the relationship-task principle of spiritual formation which was noted throughout the process of reviewing selected literature on spiritual formation. Jesus’ power, Barrs expounds, was for the disciples, and his power was also for them for the sake of accomplishing the Father’s mission.<sup>152</sup> This frames Jesus’ concern for both relationship and task. Everything about Jesus’ ways with his disciples showed his highly relational way of ministering and teaching. But, as Barrs notes, Jesus also had a global purpose from the Father that he constantly advanced. Jesus’ parting words to the disciples in Acts 1:8 were, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Though Jesus had a task to accomplish, he never treated people as merely a means for reaching his goals. He deeply loved people. On the relationship-task scale, Barrs’ observations demonstrate that Jesus was both relationship- and task-oriented, and perfectly so. He consistently valued, honored, focused on, and engaged in highly relational interaction while always honoring the Father’s will, submitting to his purpose, and carrying out his plans.<sup>153</sup> This is a key factor to note about the non-biblical literature covered in this section.

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<sup>151</sup> Jerram Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 17.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> John 5:19 ‘So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”’ John 12:49-50

As previously stated, the research presents as a primary assertion that spiritual formation is by nature a process. This principle has directed the researcher and provided criteria for evaluation of key literature. The understanding of spiritual formation as process is shared by Henri Nouwen, Robert E. Coleman, Janet Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, and J. Robert Clinton.<sup>154</sup>

In *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*, Henri Nouwen said,

Spiritual formation, I have come to believe, is not about steps or stages on the way to perfection. It's about the movements from the mind to the heart through prayer in its many forms that reunite us with God, each other, and our truest selves.<sup>155</sup>

Nouwen wrote of three movements of the spiritual life: from loneliness to solitude, from hostility to hospitality, and from illusion to prayer,<sup>156</sup> which, he says, move us toward community, not away from it. Nouwen makes the following observation from scripture,

On two occasions, Jesus invited his closest friends, Peter, John and James, to share in his most intimate prayer. The first time he took them to the top of Mount Tabor, and there they saw his face shining like the sun and his clothes white as light (Matthew 17:2). The second time he took them to the garden of Gethsemane, and there they saw his face in anguish and his sweat falling to the ground like great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). The prayer of our heart brings us both to Tabor and Gethsemane. When we have seen God in his glory we will also see him in his misery, and when we have felt the ugliness of his humiliation we also will experience the beauty of his transfiguration.

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"For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me." John 15:15 "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

<sup>154</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca Laird, "Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit," (New York: Harper Collins eBooks, 2010). Kindle edition. Janet Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, Rev. ed. (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 2005). Clinton; Robert Emerson Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Westwood, NJ: F. H. Revell Co., 1964).

<sup>155</sup> Nouwen, Christensen, and Laird.

<sup>156</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975).

For Nouwen, the movement toward spiritual life and formation does not leave us in contemplative solitude, but moves us toward intimacy with God and fellow believers.

Modern, classical, and seminal works, including Robert E. Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, often focus on Jesus' approach to training the disciples: first Jesus models what he wants to teach them; then, he has the disciples practice what they learned under his supervision.<sup>157</sup> Representing another, more recent perspective, some of the literature finds in Jesus' way of working with his disciples a justification for modern corporate management practices and styles.<sup>158</sup> The promotion of this leadership style is exemplified by Mark Ashton's *Leadership Jesus Style*:

Whether you're leading a corporation, a sports team, your family, or simply your own pursuits, issues such as mission, character, vision casting, and team building are critical to your success. Wouldn't it be great to take lessons from a master leader? Here's your opportunity. Nobody in history has surpassed Jesus of Nazareth in either methods or results. Find out his leadership secrets. They're guaranteed to make you a better leader.<sup>159</sup>

Another author takes the same tack, titling a study on Jesus' leadership style, *Jesus, CEO*.<sup>160</sup> Although these examples are not scholarly works, they represent a segment of literature that has gained wide, popular acceptance. Ashton's assertion that learning "Jesus' leadership secret" can be achieved with the author's help, and will guarantee certain results, is reductionistic and overly pragmatic. Jesus was not unconcerned with methods or results, but he was also not unconcerned with personal, relational matters. Jesus' concern is the inner transformation of his followers, whereby he turns angry enemies of God into

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<sup>157</sup> Coleman.

<sup>158</sup> Mark Ashton, *The Master and His Mission: Leadership Jesus Style*, Reality Check Six Discussions (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan: Willow Creek Resources, 2002). Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*, 1st ed. (New York: Hyperion, 1995).

<sup>159</sup> Ashton.

<sup>160</sup> Jones.

beloved sons<sup>161</sup> who now desire the things of God—to please him, to be contributors and participants in advancing the Kingdom of God.<sup>162</sup>

David G. Benner observes aspects of spiritual formation in *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Call to Self-Discovery*.<sup>163</sup> He describes spiritual formation as “transformational knowing of God . . . in the depths of our beings . . . transformational knowledge of ourselves,” and “the need to find our identity, fulfillment, and vocation in our hidden self in Christ.”<sup>164</sup> According to Benner, “Simple being is difficult to achieve and fully authentic being is extremely rare.”<sup>165</sup> Also, for Benner, the process of discovering the true-self-in-Christ is not a process of strictly linear steps.<sup>166</sup>

Spiritual formation often eludes one’s efforts to reduce it to programs or to ensure certain outcomes, and the development patterns especially resist the notion that there are shortcuts or means whereby time—or suffering—may be reduced. In *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, Janet Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich<sup>167</sup> argue that spiritual

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<sup>161</sup> Romans 5:8–11 “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” Ephesians 2:4–6 “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” Galatians 4:4–5 “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

<sup>162</sup> Galatians 4:7 “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

<sup>163</sup> David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 14.

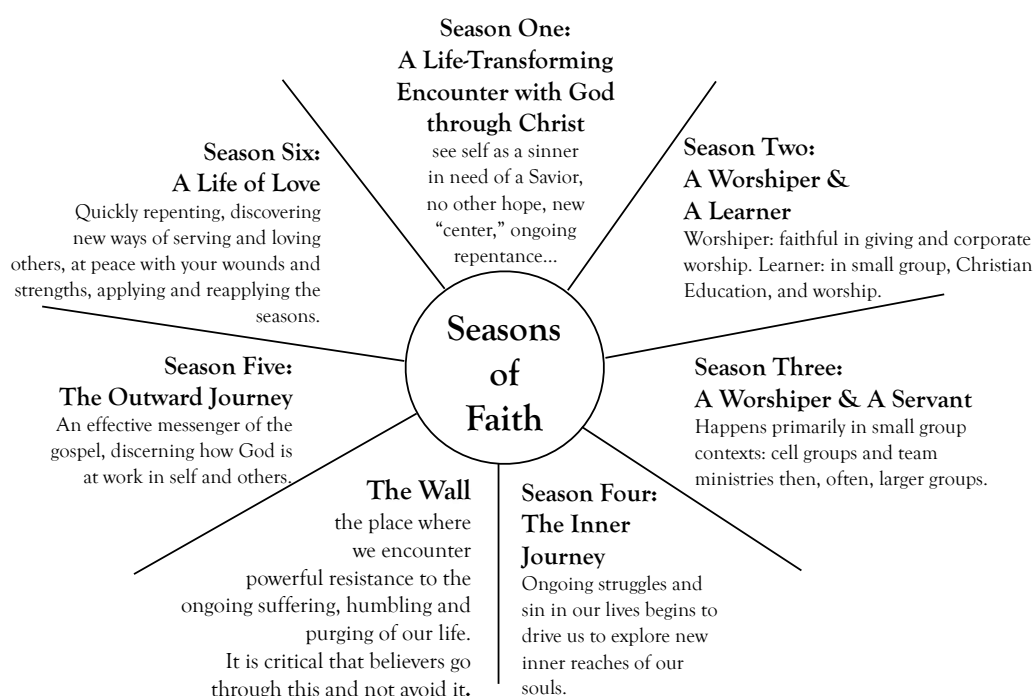
<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>167</sup> Hagberg and Guelich.



formation passes through observable stages (see Figure I). The stages, or seasons,<sup>168</sup> may be experienced repetitively, a person may move back and forth between stages with a general trend of building on the preceding stage,<sup>169</sup> or one may get stuck in a stage for a time or even indefinitely.<sup>170</sup> Hagberg and Guelich note the vital role of Christian community in helping those who are stuck to move into the next stage of maturity.<sup>171</sup>

Figure I. Seasons of Faith



Used with permission and adapted from Hagberg, Janet, and Robert A. Guelich. *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*. Rev. ed. Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 2005.

<sup>168</sup> Hagberg sometimes prefers the use of the term seasons rather than stages. For this study, the researcher employs the term “seasons” save in direct quotes from the author. Email correspondence with the author, October 20, 2007.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 7. Hagberg and Guelich observe that though the idea of stages 1-6 suggests predictability and orderliness, they stress that the stages are meant to identify sequence: “stage 1 precedes 2-6.”

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 9, 11, 43, 62-64, 81-83, 115-118, 144-146, 157-158. Note that Hagberg suggests that in stages five and six we do not become caged in the same sense as in earlier stages.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 47,48.

Hagberg and Guelich's observations and analysis concerning the stages, or seasons, of faith and the process of spiritual formation are worth noting in-depth. Season One, an individual's first life-transforming encounter with Christ, relates to new birth. This is a season of great joy and liberation, of meaning, and of hunger for God's word and the people of God.<sup>172</sup> Season Two is characterized by growth in knowledge of the new life in Christ, of the Bible, and of the particulars of worship—a stage commonly understood as discipleship.<sup>173</sup> It is a time not only of learning, but also of belonging.<sup>174</sup> Season Three is a time of service, of using one's gifts. It is a season Hagberg and Guelich call "The Productive Life," where the Christian life is "increasingly vested in symbols and aspects of the organization and its programs."<sup>175</sup> Seasons Two and Three represent the vast majority of the members of evangelical churches.

Some leaders, though not all, go on to Season Four, through The Wall, and on to Seasons Five and Six, but the authors assert that the numbers who do this are small.<sup>176</sup> When Season Four begins, it is often met with significant discomfort for it is "the Journey Inward"<sup>177</sup>—a season of struggle, inward questioning, and fathoming more fully the grip of the old nature upon the life of a believer. Some persons even appear to be losing their faith in this season.<sup>178</sup> But hope also characterizes this season, when embraced as part of God's process.<sup>179</sup> Season Four leads to an impasse these authors call "The Wall."<sup>180</sup> At the end of

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<sup>172</sup> Hagberg and Guelich, 31-50.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 51-69.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 71-89.

<sup>176</sup> From personal correspondence with the author, October 20, 2007.

<sup>177</sup> Hagberg and Guelich.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 113-130.

the inward journey of this season, the believer comes face-to-face with a “brick wall,” and the only way through it is to take it apart, brick by brick. The believer discovers at this point that the wall Jesus is seeking to take apart is the believer herself, because he seeks to liberate her. Hagberg and Guelich observe,

Not everyone goes through the Wall. Some stop or get stuck at earlier stages in the journey and never get to the Wall. Others decide at the Wall to return to an early stage. Still others get stuck in the Wall, not wanting to submit to God.<sup>181</sup>

Hagberg and Guelich observe that the Wall can be repeatedly revisited, and that “there are characteristic types of people who, when arriving at the Wall, try to avoid it or defeat it rather than experience it.”<sup>182</sup> They describe those who do not want to go through the pain of the Wall as those with feelings of self-sufficiency; those who respond with self-deprecation and think they must earn God’s free, deep, and enduring love; those who are guilty and shame-ridden, especially if they had abusive church or family experiences; those who want to think their way through the Wall; high achievers; those who are doctrinaire (either liberal or conservative); and finally, those who are ordained—because they have much at stake as leaders of their institution. Going through the Wall is “a very humbling experience. It is difficult for spiritual leaders to become that vulnerable and face it. Spiritual pride is difficult to face, especially when in a position to lead others.”<sup>183</sup> The dangerous tendency is to resist the painful process. After all, the new experience seems contrary to all that a believer has experienced in Christ and it is easier to return to the more comfortable and predictable Season Three.

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 118.

The outcomes of moving through the Wall and into Season Five, “The Outward Journey,”<sup>184</sup> are both freeing and constraining. The believer enjoys a greater measure of maturity, fruitfulness, and liberty. She feels “a renewed sense of God’s acceptance”<sup>185</sup> through her new awareness of the depths of the work of Christ in her soul, but she also discovers that far fewer believers have walked this part of the journey. It is observed that individuals in Seasons Two and Three have some difficulty understanding the attitudes and behaviors of those in the latter seasons. “At stage 5, winning, losing, and accomplishing tasks are secondary to us. The focus is more on process, not getting there, and on our role with others.”<sup>186</sup> The person in Season (stage) Five has moved “beyond duty.” A powerful observation is that the person in this season is less oriented toward productivity, and as a consequence “appears less productive.”<sup>187</sup>

Season Six, “The Life of Love,”<sup>188</sup> is season of deepened Christ-likeness, of wisdom, and of differentiation<sup>189</sup> that enables the believer to “live and work with people we never imagined we would even want to have contact with.”<sup>190</sup>

The Seasons of Faith metaphor and the analysis of Guelich and Hagberg provide a powerful paradigm for understanding spiritual formation. It describes a life-long process and provides meaningful terminology.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 131-149.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 145

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 151-160

<sup>189</sup> Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trish Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 17-18. Differentiation of self is the ability to know who we are apart from others.

<sup>190</sup> Hagberg and Guelich

In *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, J. Robert Clinton was an early observer of the idea that the lives of both biblical characters and men and women throughout Christian history go through an identifiable process of spiritual formation over a lifetime.<sup>191</sup> In a similar way to Hagberg and Guelich, Clinton generalizes this process into six stages while stressing that these are all divinely directed.<sup>192</sup>

Figure II. The Generalized Spiritual Formation Time-Line

Phase I.	Phase II.	Phase III.	Phase IV.	Phase V.	Phase VI.
Sovereign Foundations	Inner-Life Growth	Ministry Maturing	Life Maturing	Convergence	Afterglow

Clinton has developed and named a highly technical set of processes and sub-processes for the purpose of aiding leaders in ways that are beyond the scope of this study. However, his analysis has the overarching aim of helping grow leaders by identifying where God has them in the process of spiritual formation and leadership formation.<sup>193</sup>

In correspondence with a younger man who looked to him as a mentor, Clinton offered advice regarding spiritual direction. Clinton passes on the wisdom and grace he received from others, including quotes from a sermon preached to a gathering of missionaries by Andrew Murray:

<sup>191</sup> Clinton, 39-55.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. Clinton has broken down each of the six stages in his paradigm in order to identify the processes of those stages. Thus, for the Foundational Lessons stage, he identifies Inner-Life Growth Processes. Ministry Maturing Processes follow in two parts. Next come "multi-phase processes," Life Maturing Processes, Integrating and Accepting the Lessons of Life to the end of a mature ministry philosophy and leadership challenges.

1. He brought me here. It's by His will I am in this straight place. In that fact I will rest.
  2. He will keep me here in His love and give me grace to behave as His child.
  3. Then He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends for me to learn.
  4. In His good time, He will bring me out again—how and when He knows.
- So let me say: I am (a) Here by God's appointment, (b) In His keeping, (c) Under His training, (d) For His time.<sup>194</sup>

Murray imparted the wisdom of his experience to rising missionary leaders, and Clinton passed that on in his own practice of mentoring. One characteristic of the wisdom Clinton passed on is that it was not based merely on theory. The wisdom gained in Murray's own experience carried enduring authority precisely because it was borne of experience.

There is substantial agreement about the progression of spiritual formation between Clinton and co-authors Guelich and Hagberg. A similar perspective is contained in the classic devotional booklet, *The Green Letters*, in which Miles Stanford says of spiritual growth, "It seems that most believers have difficulty in realizing and facing up to the inexorable fact that God does not hurry in His development of our Christian life."<sup>195</sup>

Perhaps the greatest drama in the world is the slow and subtle growth of character in the Christian. Beauty of character can be developed only through years of reflection and experience in the Word of God as the life of Christ is increasingly lived by faith. The Christian life is a healthy, robust kind of life. It advances also through trials, for in one who has faith even suffering is not wasted, but becomes a means for increasing spiritual vigor and strength.<sup>196</sup>

Though viewed primarily from the perspective of the individual, Stanford's reflections on the biblical process of spiritual formation underscore an important theme: it

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>195</sup> Miles J. Stanford, *The Green Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1975), 13.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., Back matter.

is God who directs our spiritual maturation process, and we cooperate with him, not he with us,<sup>197</sup> and he will employ suffering among his various tools.

The necessity and centrality of a continually unfolding process of spiritual formation in the life of pastors was one of five major findings of the Pastors Summit research initiative funded by The Lilly Endowment, Inc.<sup>198</sup> The research was generated under the question, “What does it take to sustain pastors in such a way that they will flourish in ministry over the long haul?”<sup>199</sup> The initiative drew “on the experiences and expertise of seasoned pastors.”<sup>200</sup> The five primary findings from this study carry convincing weight as habits, priorities, and competencies necessary for sustainable ministry. The five themes essential to surviving and thriving in ministry are: spiritual formation, self-care, marriage and family, emotional and cultural intelligence, and leadership and management.<sup>201</sup>

According to the Pastors Summit research, as simple as these may seem, “everyone,” including pastors, “needs to work on these areas.” More than that, these areas are often neglected through busyness, or poor leadership paradigms<sup>202</sup>. As one pastor told researchers Burns, Guthrie and Chapman, “Look, I may be a pastor, but I’m an inch deep.

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<sup>197</sup> Philippians 1: 6, “...he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 2:13, “...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

<sup>198</sup> Bob Burns, *Pastors Summit: Sustaining Fruitful Ministry* (St. Louis, MO: Covenant Theological Seminary, 2010), 2. The five findings were Spiritual Formation, Self-Care, Marriage and Family, Emotional and Cultural Intelligence, and Leadership and Management. “The Lilly Endowment Inc. awarded grants totaling \$84 million dollars to 63 organizations. This initiative is based on the conviction that when churches are led by spiritually strong, thoughtful, able, and imaginative pastors, congregations tend to thrive.”

<sup>199</sup> Burns, 9.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 11.

My life is filled with incessant activity and little prayer. 'Contemplation' is foreign in my vocabulary and non-existent in my life."<sup>203</sup> The research noted,

Each theme has its own unique characteristics, but each is also intertwined with and dependent upon the others, much like the threads of a tapestry woven together into one piece. We cannot speak of self-care without taking spiritual formation into consideration, or reference leadership and management skills, without keeping marriage and family in mind. All ultimately stand together.<sup>204</sup>

The Pastors Summit research indicates that even when pastors recognize the importance of these five areas, they often find it difficult to align their habitual practices accordingly. Incorporating these ministry-sustaining habits long-term requires the influence and support of a strong, consistent community that repeatedly interacts around these themes over time.

The core matter of the pastoral leader's own spiritual formation is at the center of all the primary areas. One of the greatest challenges to the continuing spiritual formation of pastors is that they tend to depend upon their preaching and teaching preparation as a substitute for the nurture of their own souls. Keller offers a healthy critique of one of the strong forces in the church that helped to create this challenge. In his essay *Ministry and Character*<sup>205</sup> Keller points out the dominant success orientation and consumer mindset that has come into the church through the church growth movement of the 1970s and 1980s and its literature:

Individuals have been taught to be consumers, not only of retailers and merchants, but also of institutions and organizations. They will go to a

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<sup>203</sup> Burns.

<sup>204</sup> Burns, 9.

<sup>205</sup> Timothy J. Keller, "Ministry and Character," Redeemer City to City, [http://redeemercitytocity.com/resources/library.jsp?Library\\_item\\_param=629](http://redeemercitytocity.com/resources/library.jsp?Library_item_param=629) (accessed April 11 2012).



church only if (and as long as) its worship and public speaking is riveting and attractive.<sup>206</sup>

Keller says that there were helpful critiques and responses to the success orientation of the 70s and 80s during the 1990s, when a better emphasis upon faithfulness and a focus on the missional call of the church came to the forefront of church culture.<sup>207</sup> Keller describes an even better response, the biblical alternative: fruitfulness.<sup>208</sup> Not only is it a better indicator than faithfulness, or success, or missional focus, but it also serves as the biblical indicator of a genuine calling from God. He argues that this is so because,

[W]hen they teach there is little or no learning, and when they evangelize there are few or no conversions. Therefore, it is an oversimplification to say that faithfulness is either the preferred criterion (as compared to success), or that it should be the sole criterion.<sup>209</sup>

Instead Keller says that the biblical criterion is fruitfulness, with the assertion that the pastoral leader's character is the heart of the matter. He says that battling the success mindset is a character issue,

Most ministry failure stems from a neglect of the inner life and communion with God. Secondary problems, such as a minister's insufficient training or misguided approach, usually do not become full-fledged failures unless they are accompanied with—and thus magnified many times over—by failures of inner life and character.<sup>210</sup>

Keller notes in this connection pastoral pride, cowardice, indulgence, and hypocrisy — all character flaws the remedies to which are “the priority of the inner life over outward

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 1-3. Keller notes the reactions to the church growth school and its outpouring of literature. Its claim was that, “church growth was the product of following a series of “ten steps” or achieving attainable measurements, the result of which left pastors feeling that if their church was not growing then they must be incompetent.”

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 6.

ministry, and the priority of character over gifts.”<sup>211</sup> In conclusion he notes that character covers the gaps in our gifts as well as the dark side of our gifts.<sup>212</sup>

In this way he argues that spiritual formation is as important for pastors as for parishioners, if not more so. According to Keller, when pastors neglect their inner life, it hurts not only themselves and their family, but also becomes “magnified” throughout the whole congregation and that as a consequence the fruitfulness of the congregation is diminished as well.<sup>213</sup>

A recent study conducted by Austin Presbyterian Seminary sought to determine what best contributes to spiritually health in pastors: *Is the Treatment the Cure? A Study of the Effects of Participation in Pastoral Leader Peer Groups*. The study found that in the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) groups the most important factors in fostering intimacy with God had little to do with “characteristics like size, frequency and length of meetings, tenure, attendance and composition”<sup>214</sup> According to participants in the study, what mattered most, and made them want to stay in their group was, “recharging my spiritual batteries,” as well as practical help for their ministry, and accountability, strong cohesiveness in the group, and a strong facilitator/leader<sup>215</sup>

The Austin Presbyterian Seminary study found that “A peer group that is ‘like a family’ has the strongest direct effect on the participants’ own families”<sup>216</sup> and similarly, these peer groups were highly effective for the spiritual formation of Pastors.<sup>217</sup> When asked

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 4-7.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 4-7.

<sup>214</sup> Austin Presbyterian Seminary, 27.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 27.

to compare their Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) groups with other groups in which they had participated in the last ten years, the pastoral leaders in this study said their SPE groups were “better or much better.”<sup>218</sup> The reasons given included “a high level of attendance, a formal covenant or group guidelines, quality leadership, and a membership that is denominationally diverse, close, and accountable to each other.”<sup>219</sup> In fact, the quality of the facilitator is one of the strongest predictors of success of a pastoral peer group, and determines how likely a group is to continue over time. The participants in the SPE groups viewed having a third party facilitator with some form of training as one of the most important factors to the success of the group.<sup>220</sup> The conclusions of the study are informative:

In summary, our findings confirm the importance of peer groups for pastoral leaders themselves, their families and intimate friends, and their congregations. Involvement in peer groups both reflects and shapes participatory and missional congregations. Quite surprisingly, a history of participation in a peer group is related to numerical growth in a pastoral leader’s congregation. Perhaps less surprising, women pastoral leaders are attracted to and participate in SPE peer groups for some different reasons and in different ways than men. Relational and spiritual foci and practices in a less-structured group context seem especially important for women, denominationally diverse groups, and younger pastoral leaders. Pastoral leaders with more instrumental interests and who engage in group activities that employ intellectual challenge as a vehicle for ministry improvement, on the other hand, tend to be older. And it is a healthy balance of relational, spiritual, and instrumental interests and peer group practices, in the end, that yields renewed energy for and commitment to ministry for any pastoral leader. Further, as we have seen, quality leadership in a peer group matters across-the-board for positive ministry outcomes.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 29. From 68% to 75% of participants in the study said they stayed in their SPE group because of the quality of a trained facilitator, whether a credentialed professional, a denominational leader with responsibility for the group, or a minister peer who was not from within the group. Of groups who used a member of the group selected to lead, 52% of participants said that the leader was important to their continued participation.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 30.

Dwight Dubois came to similar conclusions about learning in peer relationships from a different starting point. His Alban Institute paper, *Transformative Continuing Education* was the result.<sup>222</sup> Dubois cites the common experience of coming home from a continuing education event with pages of notes and a set of binders, but six months later having no recollection of what the conference was about. Dubois said he formed a group that felt they needed to challenge this model, as well as “the understanding of leadership as knowing and following good business practices, reading the desires of members, and developing programs.” The result was a plan to create,

Six renewal events over two calendar years [that] featured twelve prominent authors, theologians, and practitioners inviting us into conversation and reflection on the practices of vision, prayer, discernment, relationship, proclamation, and service. We explored questions like what it would mean to make prayer more than bookends for meetings, how to make decisions through discernment rather than by *Robert's Rules of Order*, and how sharing personal faith stories could help us find God in our midst.

They carried their vision forward considering together how to pursue ministry “based not on what has happened before, or even on what people want” but instead on “growing in its ability to understand and plan its ministry based on God’s call and on God’s desire for the world around you” through prayer and reintroducing sacred practice to the leadership of the congregations.<sup>223</sup> The groups said, “we found that the most significant change was a renewal of spiritual life and practice. Participants reported more time being spent in prayer and in encounters

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<sup>222</sup> Dwight L. Dubois, “Toward Transformative Continuing Education,” *Alban Weekly* 2011-05-09, no. 354 (2011) (accessed March 5, 2012).

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

with Scripture.... Even more frequently, participants reported an increased understanding of and commitment to discernment (as opposed to “deciding”).<sup>224</sup>

For pastoral leaders to regain perspective, and to experience rest and renewal, requires border crossing.<sup>225</sup> Roy M. Oswald observed in *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*,<sup>226</sup> that successful pastoral-leader-peer-groups provide a regular time and place for pastors to get out of leadership role. “Periodically we need to move into a state where we do not have to be in charge and can allow ourselves to be cared for.”<sup>227</sup> Oswald explains,

In the absence of strong leadership at the center of most groups, the trust level usually doesn't develop and meetings get reduced to "bitch and brag" sessions. I don't want to minimize the usefulness of catching up on the gossip of the denomination or the community or having a place to complain about how awful things are or what wonderful things we were able to do last Sunday. But having a support group where the trust is high and where we can share our pain and vulnerability is worth its weight in gold . . . . In short, we need to hire someone to be a pastor to us when we gather as peers to review our lives! What I am advocating is a dependence model of support. It works so much better than groups that try to go it on their own, providing their own leadership.<sup>228</sup>

Oswald says that being the pastor of a group of pastors sharing their pain and struggles, and guiding it away from becoming merely a “bitch and brag” session is hard

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Holly G. Miller, *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: A Progress Report on a Lilly Endowment Initiative* (Indianapolis, IN: The Lilly Endowment, Inc., 2011), 18. Miller explains that border crossing is often accomplished when pastoral leaders take mission trips. A result of border crossing is cultivating imagination.

<sup>226</sup> Roy M. Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry* (Washington, D.C. (4125 Nebraska Ave., NW, Washington 20016): Alban Institute, 1991).

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 132. Oswald locates this need in the theory of oscillation which says that we live in two distinct states: the state in which “we depend upon our internal resources to accomplish tasks, or Intra-dependence – and the state in which we are dependent upon a resource outside of self, where we experience Grace or Sabbath time...to just BE, or Extra-dependence.... Often we can get stuck in Intra-dependence and become caught up in our roles and sense of responsibility.”

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 137.

work that should be remunerated. He claims that it makes all the difference to the pastoral leader participants to be part of a group that does not demand that they lead.

Another finding of the SPE initiative concerned cultural intelligence (CQ). To have CQ is to have the ability to read and interpret cultural signals and to be aware of one's native cultural biases when outside one's native culture. For example, an awareness of American culture allows one to recognize that when American pastors review the findings of the Pastors Summit, they will do so from an American bias toward individualism.<sup>229</sup> The work of David Livermore in his book *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World* offers an important counterpoint to the American cultural milieu. In American culture, the water one swims in and the air one breathes is that of individualism.<sup>230</sup>

When American pastors read the findings of the Pastors Summit, they make an automatic assumption that the findings are speaking to them not as a member of a group or a team, but as independent operators. The question must be asked, especially in an American, individualistic culture, "Does the issue of community, support, or team, enter into the discussion at all?" Livermore's work establishes that Americans view data through their cultural lens. The result is that all five findings of the Pastors Summit research are understood through the American cultural lens of individualism.<sup>231</sup> By contrast, the scriptural literature shows that spiritual formation took place in the context of daily discourse in the marketplace, and within in a healthy support structure, as demonstrated by the practices of Jesus and of Paul.

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<sup>229</sup> Livermore, 63.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 63-64, 68, 69, 73.

In view of this cultural bias, Livermore's analysis indicates that American culture is prone to unconsciously overlook, downplay, and ignore the role of community in spiritual formation. In addition, Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, Donald Guthrie, Tim Habbershon and Caroline Wilson assert in the Intersect Forum<sup>232</sup> that some leadership models and practices give the appearance of fulfilling the powerful myth of the hero leader, but they assert that these models militate against a spiritually healthy inner life. The Intersect Forum gives a biblically, spiritually-formed response to the hero leader model: "Grace-based leadership is the art of creating shared urgency from a framework of Gospel humility and conviction: humility based on the mercy of God and conviction based on Kingdom values."<sup>233</sup>

Heifetz and Linsky offer another reason for rejecting the hero leadership model.

Managing one's grandiosity means giving up the idea of being the heroic lone warrior who saves the day. People may beg you to play that role; don't let them seduce you. It robs them of the opportunity to develop their own strengths and settle their own issues.<sup>234</sup>

According to Heifetz, Linsky, and Parks, these models and myths endure. Bringing their critique together with Livermore's assertions regarding American cultural bias may also indicate that the great value of the Pastors Summit findings could be skewed away from sustainable ministry practices due to the ruggedly individualistic leadership styles preferred in American culture.

Again, the researcher used "*the ongoing process of maturing as a Christian both personally and interpersonally*" as a working definition for spiritual formation. Benner, Hagberg,

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<sup>232</sup> Bob Burns and others, "Intersect Forum: A Catalyst between Grace and Leadership," in *Intersect Forum*, ed. Kristen Sagar (Saint Louis, MO: Covenant Theological Seminary, 2009), 6, 32-41.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>234</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 171.

Guelich, Clinton, and Stanford provide a framework for considering the thought of authors Bonhoeffer, Garber, Peterson, and Scazzero, whose contributions will be examined more closely below. The latter authors agreed on several common elements they deemed vital to spiritual formation.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of the church and his seminal work in the area of Christian community life was a voice for spiritual formation in the midst of troubled times in the twentieth century. Eugene Peterson has pastored and written challenging words to leaders concerning biblical spirituality with scriptural and artistic sensibility. Steven Garber identifies the components of a lifetime of Christian faithfulness from the perspective of an educator. Scazzero's contribution to the conversation on spiritual formation is his observation that spiritual maturity is impossible without emotional maturity.

Bonhoeffer lived, pastored, and wrote in the crucible of Nazi Germany. The moment of history he occupied is perhaps unparalleled for the intensity of its human depravity and suffering. Bonhoeffer's formidable intellect, deep spiritual authenticity, and insistence upon sound Christocentric theology expressed in loving and just actions has established his life among the giants of Christendom.<sup>235</sup> It was this crucible that helped to produce *Gemeinsames Leben (Life Together)*, an enduring classic describing Christian community and its role in spiritual formation. Bonhoeffer's work serves well to introduce this primary theme of the literature.

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<sup>235</sup> Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy: A Righteous Gentile Vs. The Third Reich* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 197. This researcher is indebted to Metaxas for his excellent contemporary biography of Bonhoeffer.



*Spiritual Formation Requires Christian Community*

According to Bonhoeffer, God intends spiritual formation to take place within Christian community, not in isolation; indeed spiritual formation requires community. Bonhoeffer himself mentored a cadre of emerging pastoral leaders in his day. He lived out this principle of community among the twenty-five theological students at the Zingst and Finkenwalde Seminary he was asked to lead. In his view, the life of Christ is formed in us in the midst of community. Spiritual formation takes place when people live in submission to God's word and in relationship to each other.

Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* and his understanding of spiritual formation was not ivory tower theory. He began serving as a pastor in 1928 at the age of twenty-one, and continued his work throughout the ascendancy and terror of Hitler and National Socialism in Germany, until his martyrdom in 1945. The challenges he experienced during this terrible period of Germany's history served as a fiery forge for his theology, his personal spirituality, and his understanding of the role of Christian community as the *sine qua non* of personal spirituality. Of significance for this study is the observation that Bonhoeffer's own spiritual formation sustained his inner life and outward behavior amid the extreme demands and suffering of wartime Germany. During this time, he endured the horror of seeing Jewish friends and family persecuted, and saw pastoral friends drafted into the military to fight for an evil regime. He grieved over the co-opting of the German church by nationalistic fervor and the compromise that transformed it into Hitler's harlequin.

Bonhoeffer ultimately joined the resistance movement<sup>236</sup> and the plot against Hitler, which led to his own imprisonment and execution.

Garber also affirms the crucial role of community in spiritual formation. What is true of all learning is true of spiritual formation, says Garber. He explains that, “‘Come and see’ was the pedagogy of Jesus. The truest learning is incarnational; we learn the deepest lessons looking ‘over the shoulder’ and ‘through the heart,’ seeing that a worldview can become a way of life.”<sup>237</sup> For Garber, this is a community where spiritual formation always maintains a practical focus upon vocational discipleship; the shaping of a community that shapes vocations that shape culture.

Forming a worldview that can make sense of my life in the ever secularizing, ever pluralizing world, of my beliefs about God and truth, the human condition, good and evil, joy and sorrow; finding a mentor who embodies these convictions . . . someone who shows that the words can be made flesh . . . and making the choice time and again to link up, heart and mind, with a community of kindred spirits, people who together are committed to a coherent life . . . .<sup>238</sup>

Garber describes three comprehensive elements of a coherent Christian life: a biblical worldview, a mentor who lives out that worldview, and a community of believers that seek to live out a biblical worldview together in a holistic way. Garber continues his description of the coherent life as one that expresses a unity of “liturgy, life, learning, and

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 369-371. At the height of his work with the Resistance his brother in law, Hans von Dönhof, recruited Bonhoeffer into the Abwehr, among the ranks of which were fellow conspirators determined to end Hitler's satanic leadership, and life. Bonhoeffer was a spy. He was an agent of the Reich, which he deplored, pretending to be a spy for the Abwehr, an arm of that government, and in that role pretending to be a pastor to the Confessing Church, in order to spy on them. All the while he was actually not pretending to be a pastor at all, but rather was using this role as his cover to be able to freely move about pastoring and encouraging his fellow pastors.

<sup>237</sup> Garber, 19.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 197.

labor that is understood as seamless.”<sup>239</sup> He maintains that to be formed spiritually means cultivating “habits of heart that develop and sustain visions of faith and the vocations that grow out of them.”<sup>240</sup>

Remarkably, though Scazzero discovered the role of contemplative spirituality by observing Christian monastic communities,<sup>241</sup> and further noted the transforming effect that living in one such community had upon him,<sup>242</sup> he does not go on to stress the role of community in the practice of contemplative spirituality. He seems to assume that communal practice of contemplative spirituality is not possible for most Americans, and instead offers a modified rule of life for observing the daily offices.<sup>243</sup>

Peterson also stresses the need for community, but has a different emphasis. He insists that much of the pastoral activity practiced by American pastors is inauthentic, and he contrasts “pastoral busyness”<sup>244</sup> to the pastor’s true calling of the word, prayer and spiritual direction<sup>245</sup> — the latter being an activity that involves intimate interaction and unhurried time with people in the community of believers in order to part of the process of their spiritual formation.<sup>246</sup> What is spiritual direction to Peterson? He says,

[Spiritual direction] doesn't have a very exact definition, but classically, it is a friendship or companionship which enables another person to recognize and respond to God in their lives in detail not in generalities. It takes a lot

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 157-158.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 239.

<sup>245</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, New completely reset ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 3.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 4.

of leisure. You can't do it in a hurry. It requires extensive knowledge of your people. You do this over a number of years, not a number of days.<sup>247</sup>

Peterson's description of spiritual direction, "helping another person recognize and respond to God in their lives in detail," is a simple expression of community, but there are at least two important elements. He says spiritual direction requires both extensive personal knowledge the community of believers and a long time frame, it cannot be rushed, and it requires wide engagement with the local community of believers.<sup>248</sup>

### **A Rule of Life**

Bonhoeffer, Scazzero, Peterson and Garber each identify the importance of developing a rule of life for spiritual formation. Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* was that rule of life in written form. Bonhoeffer's spiritual formation in community included private and common devotions, singing together, praying together, sport, table fellowship, confession to a trusted friend, and reflections on ministry.<sup>249</sup>

The daily office (fixed hour prayer) and Sabbath practices that Scazzerro highlights for their contribution to emotionally healthy living are another expression of a rule of life.<sup>250</sup> Of particular note in the context of American culture and spirituality is his observation that both the daily office and Sabbath require one to "stop" one's activity for a time, to cease what one is doing and enter into prayer, biblical remembrance, and reflection.<sup>251</sup> Scazzero says that in this way, the realities of gospel living that otherwise slip

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<sup>247</sup> Peterson, 240.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Scazzero, 157.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 160-166.

away will remain present.<sup>252</sup> Scazzero notes that stopping at the appointed times through the day to do the work of God not only restores the sense that God is in control of all (even while one stops work<sup>253</sup>), but also begins to erase the erroneous sacred-secular dichotomy and “infuses into the rest of [one’s] day’s activities a deep sense of the sacred, of God.”<sup>254</sup>

Garber does not specifically stress the concept of a rule of life. However he describes a lifestyle that is the integration of “life, liturgy, learning, and labor.”<sup>255</sup> Peterson’s *The Contemplative Pastor*, and *Working the Angles* constitute his own description of a rule of life for pastors and particularly stress prayer, reading and deep personal connection with God in scripture, and a biblical practice of Sabbath for the pastor.

### **Fruitfulness is the Biblical Standard**

Both Peterson and Bonhoeffer critique the success model. Bonhoeffer was suspicious of his contemporaries’ infatuation with success. He evaluated this lack of discernment in the context of the immense popularity and success of Hitler up to that moment in history (prior to the realization of Hitler’s diabolical plans). Reflecting on the challenge of faithful living, commitment, and suffering, he wrote,

We simply cannot be constant with the fact that God's cause is not always the successful one, that we really could be ‘unsuccessful:’ and yet be on the right road. But this is where we find out whether we have begun in faith or in a burst of enthusiasm.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 160, 166-167.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>255</sup> Garber, 197.

<sup>256</sup> Metaxas, 318.

Peterson has another slant on this issue. He has a name for the pastor who attends or runs every committee or board meeting, always serves in some capacity at the church, but does not take care of his spouse and children. This person, who everyone thinks is wonderful, Peterson calls “unfaithful.”<sup>257</sup> But he goes further still. Peterson speaks against some of America’s enduring cultural idols—corporate models of leadership and the entertainment<sup>258</sup> often generated by a Christianized version of pop culture.<sup>259</sup>

Specifically, Peterson challenges the prevailing notion that large numbers are a positive indicator for churches. Though he believes there is a way to have a faithful large church,<sup>260</sup> he cautions,

The gospel is never going to be very popular. It never has been and it never will be. If we live the Christian faith right, it will not result in full and overflowing churches. There is just no evidence for that any place in scripture or history. If we determine successful evangelism by how many people we bring into the church, then we've got it screwed up from the start. What we have to do is make sure that we are being personal and energetic about sharing our faith—but also being honest. And I think honesty is the hard part.<sup>261</sup>

Peterson’s argument suggests that it is rare for success and faithfulness to exist side by side; that by their nature great success and popularity result in pride, the enemy of genuine spirituality. The formation of the life of Christ in the follower of Jesus does not thrive in an environment of spiritual pride. For Peterson, spiritual pride is anti-gospel and leads to corruption and compromise.

Peterson also has harsh words for pastors whose time is always filled with many activities.

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<sup>257</sup> Peterson, 237. Peterson says they are unfaithful because, “they are not doing what they are supposed to do.”

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. Peterson’s answer is that the large church can be faithful if it has many pastors.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

Busyness is the enemy of spirituality. It is essentially laziness. It is doing the easy thing instead of the hard thing. It is filling our time with our own actions instead of paying attention to God's actions. It is taking charge.<sup>262</sup>

This is one of Peterson's strongest critiques of busy pastors who believe their busyness is evidence of hard work. Pastors who model such inverted values affect the spiritual formation of their parishioners as well. Peterson believes his rebuke is richly deserved. His great, positive call is for pastors to adopt three primary occupations: prayer, scripture, and spiritual direction. These require him to be deeply engaged with God and with his parishioners, and in that way to be deeply engaged with their spiritual formation. Peterson says, "You either enter into what God is doing or you don't. A busy person is a lazy person because they are not doing what they are supposed to do."<sup>263</sup> Peterson's maxim bears repeating: the one who does many other good things, but neglects these is being lazy.<sup>264</sup>

Keller points out that it is not sufficient to simply react to the success model by swinging to the other end of the pendulum. Keller observes that "Peterson's model can also induce guilt, because it is almost unrealistic in its demands for solitude, prayer, and unhurried pastoring in a hyper-paced world."<sup>265</sup> He asserts that fruitfulness is a better measure than either success quantified by corporate metrics, or the reaction that can look like a retreat from the world.<sup>266</sup> Bob Burns says the same in *Pastors Summit: Sustaining Fruitful Ministry*.

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Keller.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 3. "I would propose then, that a more biblical gauge of ministerial evaluation than faithfulness or success is fruitfulness. From the depiction of the Hebrew nation as a vineyard to Jesus' famous "abide in the vine" speech, it is hard to miss the analogy of fruitfulness in the Bible."

What does excellence in pastoral ministry look like? Far too often, we find the answer to this question in superficial markers of success, such as the number of people in worship, a congregation's financial resources, or the development of popular programs . . . . Another answer is *faithfulness*: pastors' commitment to their calling over time, regardless of other indicators of success or failure . . . . While numerical success and faithfulness can be useful indicators of effective ministry, neither sufficiently expresses the idea of excellence. After much discussion, Pastors Summit participants concluded that a better criterion is *fruitfulness*.<sup>267</sup>

Keller goes on to note however laziness in ministry can also take the form of undisciplined self-indulgence, time-wasting, and inactivity.<sup>268</sup> Neither hyper-busyness, nor biblical expertise without self-awareness, nor dogged faithfulness without fruit measures up to the biblical standard.

*Spiritual Formation Happens in Community, but is Lived Out in the World*

Both Garber and Bonhoeffer view deeply-rooted Christian faith as a deep well that cannot help but spring forth as a godly lifestyle. One of Bonhoeffer's defining contributions is the recognition that the life of Christ is formed in us in the midst of community. Spiritual formation takes place when a group of people lives in submission to God's word and in relationship to each other. According to Bonhoeffer, Christian

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<sup>267</sup> Burns, 5. Burns credits Stafford Carson formerly of Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) and now pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Portadown, Northern Ireland for the study in his manuscript, *Called to Fruitfulness*.

<sup>268</sup> Keller. On pastoral indulgence Keller says, "We must tread carefully here. Many pastors are workaholics, driven by harmful motivations. But it seems to me that our culture's spirit of expressive individualism has affected ministers in the extremes of either overwork or idleness. While many ministers in previous generations tended to sacrifice without complaint, even when being treated unjustly by others, there are many more now who are not willing to make much in the way of sacrifices. One example of this is how unwilling many pastors are to accept positions at small, rural or inner-city churches that show little promise of advancement or higher salaries. Another example is how unproductive many pastors are; outside of very large churches, ministers do not have supervisors in the normal sense, and one of the results can be a lack of industriousness and the opportunity for self-indulgent time wasting. There are greater extremes of this in the ministry than perhaps with any other job, for obvious reasons. If you are an investment banker you may overwork or you may find ways to work moderately, but it is hard to be self-indulgent and undisciplined and remain an investment banker."



discipleship is to be lived out in the various vocations of men and women, in the midst of the world—“not in the seclusion of the cloistered life, but in the thick of foes.”<sup>269</sup>

For Garber, this is a community where spiritual formation always maintains a practical focus upon vocational discipleship. where the community shapes vocational choices that in turn shape culture.

Forming a worldview that can make sense of my life in the ever secularizing, ever pluralizing world, of my beliefs about God and truth, the human condition, good and evil, joy and sorrow; finding a mentor who embodies these convictions . . . someone who shows that the words can be made flesh . . . and making the choice time and again to link up, heart and mind, with a community of kindred spirits, people who together are committed to a coherent life where liturgy, life, learning, and labor is understood as seamless.<sup>270</sup>

Garber’s three elements are comprehensive: a biblical worldview, a mentor who lives it out, and a community of believers that seek live a biblical worldview out together in a holistic way. Again, Garber says that to be formed spiritually means cultivating “habits of heart that develop and sustain visions of faith and the vocations that grow out of them.”<sup>271</sup> These heart habits cultivate and deepen a faith that is lived out in all the work-a-day decisions and activities required to carry out fruitful, God-honoring vocations.

Vocational discipleship is rooted in relationships and in the practice of a biblical worldview, according to Garber.<sup>272</sup> Vocational discipleship is Garber’s term for a particular way of coming alongside young men and women, especially those in their twenties and

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<sup>269</sup> Bonhoeffer, 17.

<sup>270</sup> Garber, 197.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 19. Though this precise term does not occur in *Fabric*, Garber employed it in a group discussion at the Pastors Summit, February, 2008, Tiburon, CA.

thirties who have left university life and are passing through “the valley of diapers.”<sup>273</sup>

Garber says,

Embedded in a community of good friends with diverse vocations, we have committed ourselves to a common calling. As we care for the culture and the world through our vocations, we care for each other. Our worship and work take us to different places—some of us are neighbors, some are scattered across the city—but we are bound up with each other in common loves.<sup>274</sup>

In this way Garber describes the work of the Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation and Culture. Their work of vocational discipleship goes beyond the common practices of discipleship, often limited to Bible reading, prayer, worship, and learning to serve within the church by using one's spiritual gifts. The phrase “community of common loves” expresses a robust spirituality lived out in Christian community and in the broader world in order to “[care] for the culture.”

#### *Spiritual Formation Cultivates Prayer, Study of Scripture, and Spiritual Direction*

Peterson observes that, though much of pastoral ministry is public, the private and unseen aspects determine the true shape of a pastor's ministry. In *Working the Angles*, Peterson uses the image of a triangle to describe the elements of pastoral ministry. He explains that the three lines of the triangle represent three aspects of ministry that are not only visible, but also public: preaching, teaching, and administration. These are vital dimensions of pastoral ministry, but Peterson argues that the most important practices of ministry are really the ones that are private and completely unseen; they also tend to be the

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 19.

most neglected.<sup>275</sup> Like the angles of a triangle, the three angles are prayer, scripture, and spiritual direction, and they determine the shape of the triangle of pastoral ministry.<sup>276</sup> For Peterson, the contours of ministry come from the pastor's private prayer, reading and feeding upon scripture, and the pastor's practice of personal spiritual direction. These determine the depth, authenticity, authority, and the relational quality of the pastor's ministry.

A subtheme for Peterson names is that some of the tools of spiritual direction are "subversive," as when Jesus used parables.

Poetry and the arts are subversive. They come at things indirectly, they aren't usually frontal. They sneak in on you, they're quiet. And what we have spiritually is that the self is constantly construing itself against God. That's the nature of our sin: we want to be our own gods. So we have all these layers of defensiveness that often take the form of pieties. Religion is the major defense we have against God. So how do you take people that are heavily defended against God by religion and get through the defenses? Well, you do it by subversion. You get around the defenses. That's what a parable or a proverb is. Jesus did very little that was direct. People were always scratching their heads and saying, "What does he mean?"<sup>277</sup>

Peterson's strategy of subversive spirituality rings true in a rebellious world. He asserts that conventional spirituality too often reflects the world's values and practices, and erects religious, self-righteous defenses against God. His view is that biblically faithful spiritual formation must aim at circumventing our defenses against God, most pointedly when "religion is the major defense we have against God."<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Peterson, 18.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 8. Peterson's view of spiritual direction is to pay careful attention to what God is doing in another's life, and helping them to see it.

<sup>277</sup> Peterson.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

*The Long, Slow Path of Obedience Versus a Short Course to Maturity*

Like Stanford, Guelich, Clinton, and Garber, Peterson affirms long, slow spiritual formation. In *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Peterson contrasts true spiritual formation, maturity, and Christlikeness to a worldly<sup>279</sup> attitude that maintains, “If something can be done at all it can be done quickly and efficiently. Our attention spans have been conditioned by thirty-second commercials. Our sense of reality has been flattened by thirty page abridgements.”<sup>280</sup> For Peterson, discipleship or spiritual formation cannot be suddenly acquired. Peterson’s critique of the church is that it has picked up the values of a culture in a great hurry to get it done, believing that there are shortcuts to spiritual maturity.<sup>281</sup> Peterson insists “the Christian Life cannot mature under such conditions and in such ways.”<sup>282</sup> He argues that it is necessary to “go against the stream of the world’s ways” as a “disciple and pilgrim,”<sup>283</sup> as “people who spend our lives apprenticed out to Jesus . . . and who spend our lives going someplace” rather than as tourists.<sup>284</sup>

These authors each contend in different ways for the fact that spiritual formation occurs in a relationship; it needs Christian community and a rule of life that is measured by fruitfulness. Though it occurs in community, spiritual formation is lived out in the world, “in the thick of foes.”<sup>285</sup> Spiritual formation requires cultivation of prayer, scripture,

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<sup>279</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 11.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans., John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 17.

and spiritual direction in a long, slow path of obedience. God directs spiritual formation over time, and it rarely takes place in a straight line.<sup>286</sup>

### **Structured Peer Relationships: Mentoring and Learning**

In order to further explore mentoring and peer learning relationships, examples from the literature were chosen that deal with the learning process in several professional contexts (including pastoral leadership), and which could be applied to development in spiritual formation of emerging pastoral leaders. The selected literature represents a continuum from the early concerns and practice of mentoring and apprenticeship to the more sophisticated practice of structured peer-learning relationships.<sup>287</sup>

The defining literature on adaptive leadership from Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky is included in this section because of their concern for the need of organizations to adapt and grow. In other words, they have a concern for organizations to learn how to learn, and to change with new demands and circumstances.

In *Change or Die*, Alan Deutschman observes the latest findings in psychology, cognitive science, and medicine as containing the keys to how people change.<sup>288</sup>

Deutschman learned that patients with severe heart disease, even when threatened with a

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<sup>286</sup> Hagberg and Guelich, 2-17.

<sup>287</sup> Ragins and Kram. In 1985, "Kathy Kram published *Mentoring at Work*, which offered a theoretical foundation for understanding developmental relationships at work for both men and women. This book captured and defined the construct of mentoring, planted a theoretical foundation for the field, and ignited a program of research that moved the concept of mentoring from an abstract academic construct to a household word."

<sup>288</sup> Alan Deutschman, *Change or Die: The Three Keys to Change at Work and in Life*, 1st ed. (New York: Regan, 2007).

high probability of a repeated, costly surgical procedure, and even of death, that this is not sufficient for them to change the way they live to a healthier, happier lifestyle.<sup>289</sup>

Citing cases from medicine, the automotive industry, and an initiative with ex-convicts, he demonstrates that the three keys to change are to “Relate, Repeat, and Reframe.”<sup>290</sup> He says that in order to change,

You form a new emotional relationship with a person or a community that inspires and sustains hope ... The new relationship helps you learn, practice, and master the new habits and skills that you’ll need ... The new relationship helps you learn new ways of thinking about your situation and your life.<sup>291</sup>

Martha Burns points to the fact that ingrained behaviors actually change our brains. In *Our Plastic Brains*, Burns says, “The human brain is, in fact, quite malleable, even into adulthood. Neuroscientists call this malleability “plasticity.”<sup>292</sup>

Using the example of business leaders’ oft-noted resistance to change,<sup>293</sup> Deutschman says,

Businesspeople are ... highly trained specialists and they've distorted their brains as well ... [An older executive] has a great number of specialized skills and abilities. A specialist is a difficult thing to create and is valuable for a corporation but specialization also instills an inherent “rigidity.” The cumulative weight of experience makes it more difficult to change.<sup>294</sup>

The key, says Deutschman, is the new relationship, new learning, new thinking combination that, he says, actually changes us, because it even changes our brains.

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 1-5.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Martha S. Burns, “Our Plastic Brains,” *T.H.E. Journal* 38, no. 5 (2011) (accessed May 2011).

<sup>293</sup> Deutschman, 122. Deutschman notes that when a corporation is highly successful for a great length of time, “its culture and people become set in their ways” and when the industry changes, they don’t. Repeated success and expertise actually impedes organizations when the world changes around them.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 124.

The seminal work of Heifetz and Linsky is laid out in their books *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* and *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*.<sup>295</sup> Pertinent to this study is the idea of the adaptive leader—one who leads in a living system, enabling the organization to face its greatest challenges by guiding it through an adaptive learning process.<sup>296</sup> This leadership model is highly suited to the work of local church congregations, and has been applied in that way by Kevin Graham Ford in *Transforming Church: Bringing out the Good to Get to Great*.<sup>297</sup> According to Heifetz, Linksy, and Ford, in contrast to the hero model of leadership, adaptive leadership is sustainable. Adaptive leadership is effective when congregations face challenges resulting from changing realities that the organization does not have the knowledge or technical skill to address. In *Leadership Can be Taught*, Sharon Daloz Parks, observed the teaching laboratory of Ron Heifetz, and his critique of the model of the hero leader,<sup>298</sup> which has become the defining model of leadership in the church.

Parks notes,

Few would deny that the heroic myth remains a dominant player in the commercial, social, and political psyche. Whether we are dealing with fame or blame, we continue to prize and promote the myth of the individual person as autonomous and in control in our assumptions about leadership.<sup>299</sup>

Timothy Keller has become a trusted teacher among church planters and pastors in the PCA, his denomination, and beyond, conducting small pastoral conferences at

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<sup>295</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009); Heifetz and Linsky.

<sup>296</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 13-15.

<sup>297</sup> Kevin Graham Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing out the Good to Get to Great*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008).

<sup>298</sup> Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 204, 264n.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

Redeemer Presbyterian Church's three sites in Manhattan and maintaining a vigorous leadership role in the City-to-City church planting network. This network has planted churches all over the New York metro area, as well as in the UK, Ireland, Berlin, and the Netherlands. In an interview with Eleanor Barkhorn of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Keller was asked why he waited until so late in his life to begin writing.

The interviewer asks, "You've been a minister for a while, and you've led Redeemer for more than two decades. What made you decide to start writing books for a wide audience now, rather than earlier in your career?" Keller's response is interesting.

I'm 60. I've been here for 20 years. I've had almost 40 years of ministry. I waited deliberately to write for a few reasons. One is I wanted to get pretty much mature in my thinking. . . . If I were a man in my 30s or even my 40s writing, then I would be afraid that I'd evolve on past what I'd written down.<sup>300</sup>

Keller evidently believes it is more important to gain wisdom and experience to pass on than to prematurely author books. His answer is also noteworthy for its implications. He implies that most young men have not lived and studied long enough to leave an enduring legacy in writing just yet. He may have come to writing later in his career, but Keller has passed on a rich reservoir of thought and biblical reflection with his books *The Prodigal God* and *The Reason for God*.<sup>301</sup> In addition to his work at Redeemer and with the City-to-City network, Keller mentors numerous established and rising pastoral leaders.

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<sup>300</sup> Eleanor Barkhorn, "How Timothy Keller Spreads the Gospel in New York City, and Beyond," *The Atlantic Monthly Group*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2011/02/how-timothy-keller-spreads-the-gospel-in-new-york-city-and-beyond/71301/> (accessed March 22 2011).

<sup>301</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*, 1st ed. (New York: Penguin Group/Dutton, 2008). Timothy J. Keller, *The Reason for God : Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008).



James Houston expresses what it means to be a mentor in *The Mentored Life: From Individualism to Personhood*. He defines a mentor as “a facilitator of the hearts and minds of others.”<sup>302</sup> Commenting on his unconventional approach to leadership, he says,

I have devoted my life to mentoring, first as an Oxford don for twenty-five years, then teaching in a secular environment, and then for another thirty years at Regent College among theological students. It has been an enriching life, in deliberately choosing to be a facilitator of the hearts and minds of others rather than following the practice of more conventional understandings of “Christian leadership.”<sup>303</sup>

Houston does not find his form of mentoring the typical practice among those discussing and practicing Christian leadership. Houston’s description is an agreeable and attractive one; but it must be noted that his mentoring relationships with students generally end after their relatively brief timeframe of theological education. More to the point is the work of Sharon Daloz Parks.

The research of Sharon Daloz Parks provides keen insight and wisdom into the field of mentorship and its particular educational processes. Parks writes from the perspective of an educator who seeks to mentor emerging adults. In her writing, the lines between the need for mentors and the delineation of emerging adult characteristics are continually crossed and blurred. She has made an impressive contribution to the field of education in her study of Ron Heifetz’s teaching methods, which she recorded in her book *Leadership Can Be Taught*.<sup>304</sup> In *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, Parks addresses the millennial generation, now in the stage known as emerging adulthood.<sup>305</sup> One of her primary observations is the hunger of

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<sup>302</sup> Houston, 13.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Parks.

<sup>305</sup> Parks.

millennials to be mentored—to have significant interaction with someone older and wiser with whom they can learn to navigate life.<sup>306</sup> In the preface, she explains the urgency for a would-be mentor to “understand the formation of the young adult imagination and its implications for forming meaning, purpose, and faith.”<sup>307</sup> Significantly, she states, “This book argues for the even larger significance of mentoring environments in the formation of all commitments, especially commitment to the common good and the building of a more vibrant and just culture.”<sup>308</sup>

Parks says that she hopes by writing *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* to encourage a resurgence of the practice of mentorship:<sup>309</sup> “an intentional, mutually demanding, and meaningful relationship between two individuals, a young adult and an older, wiser figure who assists the younger person in learning the ways of life.”<sup>310</sup>

Parks had abundant opportunity to observe students and relate to them in the classroom with Ron Heifetz, and in interviews for *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*. She noted that young adults expressed that “some of their most valued learning occurred with a teacher and a small group of students.” For these students, the “learning environment” has significance not only for formal learning, but also for the process of making meaning of that learning, in a way that enables them to integrate life, learning, and faith.

Among the most compelling ideas is the creation of “mentoring communities”<sup>311</sup> where co-mentoring occurs, “a learning environment in which the leadership team

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 133. Parks’ entire book speaks of this hunger as do her many recorded conversations with young adults within.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 134.

members model mutual support and challenge among each other.”<sup>312</sup> Parks says that mentoring communities offer a place of “belonging” where contemplation and asking “big enough questions” is encouraged. This kind of environment invites the exploration of worthy dreams. “The Dream, with a capital D,” says Parks, “is an imagined possibility that orients meaning, purpose, and aspiration.”<sup>313</sup> She believes this process forms a faith to live by. “The Dream in its fullest and most spiritual sense is a sense of vocation.”<sup>314</sup>

In *The Power and Potential of Collaborative Learning Partnerships*, edited by Iris M. Saltiel, Angela Sgroi, and Ralph G. Brockett, essayists explore various expressions of learning communities.<sup>315</sup> Saltiel notes that mentoring was a significant focus of research in the 1980s. Since then, there has been a progression from mentoring as a one-on-one activity towards learning partnerships. Saltiel includes the work of Sharan B. Merriam, L. A. Daloz and others who have experimented with various expressions of learning communities. This process of experimentation is ongoing.<sup>316</sup> The literature examined for this study reflects the progression of thought regarding mentoring. While the early literature on mentoring was primarily concerned with one-on-one relationships, eventually the power of learning within a group of peers emerged.

As Oswald discovered with pastoral leaders, and Parks discovered among young adult students, the power of mentoring is multiplied when it exists at the center of a small group of peers who also contribute what they are learning to the enrichment of the group.

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>315</sup> Iris M. Saltiel, Angela Sgroi, and Ralph G. Brockett, *The Power and Potential of Collaborative Learning Partnerships*, ed. Susan Imel, New Directions for Adult Continuing Education (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1998), 9.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

According to Saltiel, Oswald, and Parks there is a great need for this kind of mentoring among a cohort of peers. People need and want a place to learn experientially and relationally in an atmosphere of respect and trust.

### Emerging Adults

Authors were chosen because they are concerned with the particular demographics and life challenges of emerging adults who are engaged in pastoral leadership roles. Examples drawn from the literature included those that explore emerging adults' self-expressed desire for development in spiritual formation through mentoring relationships.

The interchangeable use of terminology can create confusion in a study such as this. Robert Wuthnow uses the term "younger adults" in his volume, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*<sup>317</sup> preferring this term to GenX or the alliterative Builders, Boomers, and Busters<sup>318</sup> or even the pervasive, "twenty-somethings." For the purposes of this study the term emerging adulthood is understood to refer broadly to the time between adolescence and adulthood and is a generational development of those who came of age around 2000; also called "Millennials."<sup>319</sup>

In "Millennials Go to College," Neil Howe and William Strauss defined the emerging adult demographic as those who will rise to positions of leadership in the church as they complete their education. They explain, "The Millennial Generation, born from 1982 through the present, represents a generational cohort, distinct from their parents of

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<sup>317</sup> Wuthnow.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 3-7.

the Baby Boom generation, and their immediate predecessors, Generation X.”<sup>320</sup> Howe and Strauss have provided this pithy snapshot of the Millennial Generation,

Unlike Generation X’s traumatic, latchkey childhood, the Millennials grew up in an era that placed high value on children—reflected in everything from the products on the shelves (Cabbage Patch Dolls, “Baby On Board” stickers) to the media (pro-kid movies like *Baby Boom* and *Three Men and A Baby*, a sharp rise in kids magazines and TV shows). Even the TV show, “Barney and Friends” (featuring teamwork and commonalities) stole the limelight from “Sesame Street” (which featured individualism and uniqueness). Part of this trend is the emergence of “helicopter parents”—always hovering, ultra-protective, unwilling to let go, and enlisting . . . ‘the team’ (parent, physician, lawyer, other counselors) to assert a variety of special needs and interests.<sup>321</sup>

According to Howe and Strauss, Millennials “are the most racially and ethnically diverse . . . generation in US History. As of 2002, non-whites and Latinos accounted for 37% of the 20-or-under population in 2002.” They go on to say, “In fact, non-white youths are often bigger contributors to this generations’ emerging persona than white youths.”

Howe and Strauss describe Millennials as having seven core characteristics—special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving:<sup>322</sup>

**Millennials are Special** — As Millennials absorb the adult message that they dominate America’s agenda, they come to the conclusion that their problems are the nation’s problems, their future is the nation’s future, and that, by extension, the American people will be inclined to help them solve those problems.

**Millennials are Sheltered** — Everywhere Millennials go . . . they expect to be kept safe. From school uniforms, to identity cards, to V-Chips, to fences and metal detectors at school, Millennials have grown up with a premium on security, and they support harsh punishments for those who misbehave. The doctrine of *in loco parentis*, long denigrated by Boomers and GenX-ers is regaining support among both Millennial students and their parents.

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<sup>320</sup> Howe and Strauss.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

**Millennials are Confident** – More than four in five teens believe that they will be financially more successful than their parents—a percentage that rose sharply during the 90s.

**Millennials are Team-oriented** – Millennials are trying to make all the pieces fit together a bit better . . . and this connected generation of teens tends to view the major causes of America’s problems as the consequences of adult individualism, and issues of gender, race and ethnicity are losing importance, while issues related to income inequality are gaining.

**Millennials are Conventional** – The conventionality of the Millennials seems to stem from their general sense that rules and standards can make life easier. This generation feels loved by their parents, and perceives a diminished generation gap—their parents are in touch with their lives and it’s easier for them to talk with their parents about sex, drugs and alcohol than it was for previous generations.

**Millennials are Pressured** – As transcripts, test scores and even attendance records become more important in the marketplace, and in the minds of students, an assumption is emerging among today’s youth that long term success demands near-term achievement, reviving the connection between effort and payoff. There is less of a sense among Millennials than among their Gen X predecessors that one can rebound from failure. This pressure to succeed has led to an emphasis on planning, and time management is becoming more important in order to fit in all the necessary activities.

**Millennials are Achieving** – With their plans and their pressure, and confidence all in tow, Millennials have shown a great propensity to achieve. With achievement test scores at an all-time high, and strong extra-curricular programs, today’s teens not only are successful, they know they are successful.<sup>323</sup>

Though emerging adults with their unique characteristics have not yet entered primary of leadership roles Wuthnow, says they are already exerting their influence. Wuthnow says, “Americans between the ages of 21 and 45 are not just a harbinger of the future. They are already a significant share of the population.”<sup>324</sup>

The Pew Research Center’s report, *Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next* begins with a caveat:

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<sup>323</sup> Howe and Strauss, 2-3.

<sup>324</sup> Wuthnow, 6.

[We] know we can never completely disentangle the multiple reasons that generations differ. At any given moment in time, age group differences can be the result of three overlapping processes: 1) Life cycle effects. Young people may be different from older people today, but they may well become more like them tomorrow, once they themselves age. 2) Major events (wars; social movements; economic downturns; medical, scientific or technological breakthroughs) affect all age groups simultaneously, but the degree of impact may differ according to where people are located in the life cycle. 3) Cohort effects. Period events and trends often leave a particularly deep impression on young adults because they are still developing their core values; these imprints stay with them as they move through their life cycle.<sup>325</sup>

Nevertheless Millennials, employing their term, have distinctive characteristics that were important for this study. Perhaps the most pertinent is the fact that Millennials are disconnected and disconnecting from the church. The Pew Research Center's report states,

By some key measures, Americans ages 18 to 29 are considerably less religious than older Americans. Fewer young adults belong to any particular faith than older people do today. They also are less likely to be affiliated than their parents' and grandparents' generations were when they were young. Fully one-in-four members of the Millennial generation are unaffiliated with any particular faith.<sup>326</sup>

David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins look at church "insiders" who have left the church and even the faith in *You Lost Me—Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church—and Rethinking Faith*. This study found that the 25% of those emerging adults who grew up in church and have disconnected from it say that the church is not a safe place for them or their friends.<sup>327</sup> Not only does this large sector of the emerging adult cohort feel unsafe in church, "they feel disdain for one-sided communication, disconnected from formulaic faith, and discomfort with apologetics that seem disconnected from the real world."<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Keeter.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>327</sup> David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, "You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church~ and Rethinking Faith," (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2011).

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

Kinnaman says this group feels churches are inhospitable to honest questions and doubts; “*You Lost Me* signals their judgment that the institutional church has failed them.”<sup>329</sup>

In *After the Baby Boomers*,<sup>330</sup> Robert Wuthnow represents a different perspective on the Millennial Generation. He writes that it is more difficult to assign a generational identity label for the youngest generation than it was for baby boomers and others 9/11 notwithstanding.<sup>331</sup> He argues that one of the distinctive characteristics of emerging adults is that there has been no major shaping event for this generation as there was with the silent generation, the parents of boomers, for example, who were defined by World War II. Wuthnow argues that this means there is both continuity and discontinuity with the previous (boomer) generation but that there is no pattern or formula to describe the younger generation that can be discerned from a profile of the younger adult generation.<sup>332</sup> It should also be noted that Wuthnow thinks of younger adults much more broadly than most of the literature. In his research he had in view “those who were between the ages of 21 and 45 in the years from about 1998 to 2002.”<sup>333</sup>

Elliott Currie researched cases from among a subset of the youngest emerging adults, those who have made a complete disaster of their lives or on the brink of doing so. He says in *The Road to Whatever: Middle-Class Culture and the Crisis of Adolescence*, that they were reared in a form of social Darwinism that their parents had imbibed as well.<sup>334</sup> Currie

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Wuthnow.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>332</sup> Wuthnow will not even commit to using the term “Millennials,” or “busters.”

<sup>333</sup> Wuthnow, 6.

<sup>334</sup> Currie, 121.



explains this was an accepted belief system, not merely the result of “being harried by social and economic forces beyond their control.”<sup>335</sup> He describes this belief system as a

[C]ultural and psychological orientation toward the world—especially toward the bedrock issues of responsibility and mutuality, discipline and nurturance. Most of these parents were not just victims of this belief system but subscribers to it.... The rejection of the idea of mutual responsibility, a righteous distaste for offering help, the acceptance or encouragement of a view of life in which a competitive scramble for individual preeminence and comfort is central, the insistence that even the most vulnerable must learn to handle life's difficulties by themselves and that if they cannot it is no one's fault but their own. These were not the idiosyncratic views of a few parents but pervasive themes in American society and culture during the years in which these teens were growing up.<sup>336</sup>

Currie argues there is a need for a radical shift toward a culture of support<sup>337</sup> to replace the destructive mix of “harshness and heedlessness . . . quick to punish slow to help, deeply moralistic, and profoundly neglectful”<sup>338</sup> parenting they received. But the destructive influence went beyond the parenting these young adults received. They imbibed “the larger carelessness of the society around them”<sup>339</sup> in the very air they breathed. In Currie’s estimation, the bottom line for the troubled young adults in his research was that

Too often, nobody cared enough to put in the sustained work that they needed to grow and thrive. That was especially true if something went wrong. Over and over again, at that critical point, it turned out to be no one’s job to help them get back on track.<sup>340</sup>

As Currie suggests, there is a better way.<sup>341</sup> He outlines a six-fold strategy that includes an environment where there are 1) Places to Go, 2) Things to Do, 3) Inclusive Schools, 4) A Community of Shepherds—an excellent description of intensively involved

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 121, 122.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 254-284.

and caring adults, 5) A New Kind of Treatment (not isolating and individualized professional mental health interventions), and 6) Family Friendly Policies (policies that allow parents workplace flexibility to allow them to be there for their children when needed).

Considering Currie's case studies and the observed disaffection emerging adults have toward the church, it is not surprising that Wuthnow reports pastoral hand wringing over the future of the church.<sup>342</sup> However, Wuthnow is confident of the survival of congregations into the next generation, though he remarks that survival as a result of inertia and survival as a fruit of vitality are two different things.<sup>343</sup> Currie assigns blame to unfriendly government policies, moralistic but non-nurturing parents, and communities that are disconnected and punitive<sup>344</sup> Wuthnow agrees, but goes beyond him concerning the role of religion, saying,

Young adulthood [is] lacking the institutional support it needs and deserves. We cannot hope to be a strong society if we invest resources in young people until they are eighteen or twenty and then turn them out to find their way entirely on their own. I am not talking about some system of public welfare or extended educational assistance. The bits and pieces of support are already there in family networks, among groups of friends, at singles bars, in day care centers, and even in the work place. But we have not even begun to recognize the challenges that need to be met. We need a thorough-going discussion of the needs that young adults experience, just as we have had such discussions about the needs of children and those of the elderly. How young adults can more responsibly make complex decisions about careers, finances, marriage, and parenting must be an important part of these discussions. Religion is but one of the sectors that needs to be represented. Traditionally, religion has been an important resource for networking, for intergenerational ties, and for transmitting values to adults as well as to children. It can continue to be in the future, but only if it faces changes currently taking place among young adults.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Wuthnow, 230.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>344</sup> Currie, 155.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 232.

According to Wuthnow, the task facing the church is to navigate the intergenerational polarization between those who are “conservatively religious” and those who are more open, as it seeks to guide young adults through their challenges.<sup>346</sup>

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how emerging pastoral leaders develop in spiritual formation through structured peer relationships. Four areas of literature have been reviewed: biblical literature on spiritual formation and mentoring, general literature on spiritual formation, literature on mentoring and structured peer relationships, and literature about emerging adults. The literature on structured peer relationships explored the benefit of such relational structures for spiritual formation. The literature on emerging adults explained the challenges and needs of spiritual formation among pastors as they rise from their late twenties into their thirties and into primary leadership roles in the church.

The following section reports on the methodology used in the collection and analysis of participant data.

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<sup>346</sup> Wuthnow, 232.

## CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to discover how emerging pastoral leaders develop in spiritual formation through structured peer relationships and mentoring. This qualitative study was designed to explore pastoral leaders' experience in structured peer relationships: a supportive cohort, or "community of practice," where they engaged in intentional interaction while planting or pastoring churches. This particular structured peer group model emulates the experiential learning practice: reflective immersion.

### Design of the Study

This study was designed using qualitative research methodology. This method affords an *in vivo* glimpse of events and significant moments in a living system.<sup>347</sup> Since actual events within the system drive the content of the research, using a qualitative research approach allows for viewing the subject area and drawing conclusions based upon observation.<sup>348</sup> This approach enables the researcher to develop hypotheses from the case study or incident, rather than beginning with a hypothesis and testing it against a mass of data.

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<sup>347</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 2nd ed., Jossey-Bass Education Series. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 1. The living system is the context under examination: "Qualitative inquiry, which focuses on meaning in context, requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data."

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

The researcher will be the primary instrument of data collection,<sup>349</sup> and data will be collected using personal interviews based on the critical incidents method. A critical incident is an experience that vividly stands out in the participant's memory as one that has significantly shaped him in his practice of ministry and thus is particularly suited to observing reflection after the fact. The incident may be either positive or negative, as long as it was a watershed experience. This method will be useful because, as Merriam says, it is "particularly interested in insight, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing and has, as one of its three main characteristics, the property of being heuristic, illuminating the readers understanding."<sup>350</sup>

The research methodology used was a semi-structured interview protocol, as well as a focus group. This method is particularly appropriate because participants have great freedom to express how the experience in which they are participant has affected them. The interaction among the group participants became part of the learning process for them, and also stimulated the heuristic quality of the experience.<sup>351</sup>

### **Participant Selection**

Individual participants, who had been engaged in active ministry up to the time of the interview and following their pre-ministry preparation, were chosen. In one case the participant was no longer serving in fulltime vocational ministry. Participants were from thirty to forty-five years of age and were from diverse denominational affiliations including the Baptist General

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>351</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 94.

Conference, the Presbyterian Church in America, the Virginia Baptist Association, and the Ecclesia church-planting network in the eastern United States.

The six participants had all been involved in structured peer groups, according to the definition used in this research. Two participants were involved in the most recent iteration of the Pastors Summit Initiative,<sup>352</sup> and also were part of the focus group for this research. The participants' reflections reach back to the learning process in pastoral leader peer groups. The researcher sought to access this rich data through interviews and a focus group. In this way the research will seek to discover how pastors' experience in structured peer relationships has shaped them in their personal spiritual lives and as pastors.

The focus group comprised pastors, from the Acts 29 Network, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Church in America. It consisted of participants in the second iteration model of the Pastors Summit. This model, dubbed the Missouri Pastors Summit, provided additional and separate data drawn from a distinct set of focus group questions. The Missouri Pastors Summit was ongoing during the researcher's data collection and analysis. Two members of the focus group were also research participants, who provided data from previous experiences of structured peer groups.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher recorded all interviews using a digital recording device. Three participant interviews were conducted by Skype and three participants were interviewed in person. Research

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<sup>352</sup> Miller, 2. The Pastors Summit is an initiative of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) Initiative of the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol.<sup>353</sup> A list of several specific questions was written down to serve as a guide for the interview, while allowing for follow up questions to be posed in response to participants' particular responses. Several of the questions were open-ended and allowed for further probing. Interviews were conducted over the course of six weeks. During that period, follow-up interviews were conducted with two participants. For the focus group, a scribe collected data using handwritten notes and followed up with clarifying questions, including some that were sent via electronic mail. The response data became part of the material analyzed by the researcher.

### **Interview Protocol**

Interviews were conducted in order to develop data for analysis in relation to the research questions. The two initial interviews were approximately thirty minutes in length and served as semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were then adapted and revised in the subsequent iterations.<sup>354</sup> Subsequent interviews were approximately sixty to ninety minutes in length. The focus group dialogue spanned interactions from a series of four three- hour cohort meetings. Focus group questions were open-ended with the purpose of generating responses that were most meaningful from the participants.

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<sup>353</sup> Merriam, 102-103.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 95.

### *Participant Interview Questions*

Tell me about your current ministry context and how long you have been there.

Was there a critical incident in your ministry that led you to consider being part of your pastor group?

Please describe the way the group was structured and the setting.

How would you describe the nature of the peer group experience overall?

How would you describe the relationships among the men?

What did you discover about the value or impact of these relationships?

How would you describe the trust level of the relationships?

Describe the role of these relationships in your Christian maturity.

In what ways or situations did you feel your peer mentoring in this group was most helpful?

Is there anything you would like to add?

### *Focus Group Questions*

How has the Pastors Summit affected you?

What could be improved or changed?

Understanding that this is a process, what works and what doesn't?

Is there anything else that you think would be helpful to share?

### **Analysis Procedures**

Interviews were conducted via Skype or in person and were recorded for data transcription. The resulting transcripts were analyzed using the constant comparative



method. Pseudonyms were used in order to protect the privacy of participants. The constant comparative method of analysis is a means to “seek patterns in the data. These patterns are arranged in relationship to one another in the building of a grounded theory.”<sup>355</sup> More simply, by this means the researcher is “making sense of the data.”<sup>356</sup> In this way, analysis surfaced several themes and subthemes from the data. The following research questions were used:

1. What structured peer relationships did emerging pastoral leaders participate in after their pre-ministry preparation?
2. What spiritual formation did emerging pastoral leaders experience in structured peer relationships after their pre-ministry preparation?
3. What mentoring did emerging pastoral leaders experience through structured peer relationships after their pre-ministry preparation?

### **Limitations of the Study**

Six participants and one focus group were interviewed. The six participants were asked to share a critical incident<sup>357</sup> in their ministry. The critical incident could be one that was defining in the sense that it was, in the participant’s view, “the way it should always be.” Conversely, the incident could be one that was painful and difficult but that impacted the pastor deeply. The researcher then used each pastor’s critical incident as the context for

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<sup>355</sup> Merriam, 18.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>357</sup> Donna H. Redmann, Judith J. Lambrecht, and Wanda L. Stitt-Gohdes, "The Critical Incident Technique: A Tool for Qualitative Research," *Delta Pi Epsilon Journal* 42, no. 3 (2000): 132. According to Redmann, et. al. “the critical incident technique (CIT) is an appropriate qualitative research tool used for gaining an understanding of the nature of specific real-world...settings. It is particularly well suited for examining events considered to be success or failure.”

questions concerning their participation in a structured peer group. The focus group also answered questions about their experience in their structured peer group.

### **Research Position**

In qualitative study the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. This means all observations and analyses in the study are filtered through the researchers' perspectives and values. The researcher's disciplinary orientation is that of a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, with a career emphasis in pastoral, mission, and church planting ministry. This is the theoretical framework through which observations are made in this study. Merriam explains that researchers must be sensitive to understand how biases or subjectivity shape the investigation and its findings. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to employ critical self-reflection to identify and disclose potential sources of biases, assumptions, worldview, theoretical orientation and other connections to the study that may affect the investigation.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Merriam, 21-23, 42-43, 216.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of the research was to explore how emerging pastoral leaders develop in spiritual formation by being mentored through structured peer relationships. The study was based upon interviews with six pastors from four different denominational affiliations and from diverse geographical settings. In addition, the six participants were selected because they were part of a structured peer relationship. The research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What structured peer relationships did emerging pastoral leaders participate in after their pre-ministry preparation years?
2. What spiritual formation did emerging pastoral leaders experience in structured peer relationships after their pre-ministry preparation years?
3. What mentoring did emerging pastoral leaders experience through structured peer relationships after their pre-ministry preparation years?

The participants were all emerging pastoral leaders; they were beyond the initial immersive transition<sup>359</sup> into fulltime vocational ministry and were the primary pastoral leaders in their congregations. Each participant had sought out the opportunity to be in a pastoral peer group. Each of the structured peer groups had a leader or facilitator and some form of a group covenant. One of the pastors reported that his group had shared facilitation. The others had a designated facilitator. Group covenants ranged from loosely

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<sup>359</sup> Wind and Wood, 26.

-defined and open-ended, to employing a signed covenant, requiring group confidentiality and attendance over a finite time frame.

Without exception the participants reported that their experience in their peer group was significant and important to them. Three of the participants said their experience was transformative, and that it has permanently changed the trajectory of their ministries.

### **Introductions to the Pastors Interviewed During this Study**

#### *Miguel*

Miguel is a former church planter in a western college town. He is a first generation Latino immigrant who grew up in a ministry family. Miguel is 45 years old, and is married to Gina, his college sweetheart. Together they have two children. While he was in youth ministry, Miguel was encouraged to consider church planting. This became a dream for him—a way to express a gospel vision, to preach the gospel and to see its fruit transform students and families in a loving spiritual community. Much of that vision was realized. It was a beautiful, yet difficult time. He had a high sense of God's calling and was gifted for church planting. He said that he was having the time of his life, and could not believe that he was paid to do this work. There was true convergence of his gifts to the work and the setting.

Bethel church had many original worship compositions written by their gifted musician and worship leader who was also a close personal friend. People were drawn to the beautiful worship, to the fellowship, and to Miguel as a fun and loving pastor-teacher.

But Miguel also remembered another side of his experience. Recalling his first year of church planting, Miguel said, “guys go in [to church planting] with all kinds of dreams and hopes, and I was into it enough that I was getting my ass kicked, you know, in different areas. The honeymoon was over for me . . . .”

In answer to whether Miguel had participated in any structured peer relationships during this season of ministry, he said, “It was about this time, a year into the church plant, when I attended a denominational boot camp for church planters where I met, and just clicked with, David, who was another pastor in the region.”

Miguel and David began a conversation about how the pressures of growing a church challenged their ability to maintain an inner life of living faithfully in Christ. Together, they acknowledged the pragmatic realities of church planting in America along with the lack of attention paid to the spiritual life of church planters. Approximately a year later, David invited Miguel to a meeting of a small non-profit organization — The Omega Initiative—that David founded. The Omega Initiative had been giving grants to church planters to help them with start-up costs. While administering these grants, David had observed church planters who were struggling in their marriages; wrestling with unhealthy, driven lifestyles; and burning out. He also observed that there were many places where planters could find start-up funds, but there were virtually no funds dedicated to care for these men’s souls. David was about to propose to his board a change of focus for the project. He invited three other people to join that discussion: Miguel, this researcher, and his spouse. Miguel said,

David was sharing with us that he was increasingly dissatisfied with The Omega Initiative just simply doling out money. And he began to express the importance of

relationship, matters of the heart, support, and encouragement. So that's where the idea of investing in church planters' hearts rather than in their start-up expenses or medical bills began.

Already Miguel had concluded that the internal issues he was wrestling with were not being addressed by coaching and strategic support. So he joined what became an eighteen-month pilot program of soul care for church planters through structured peer relationships. The pilot was not "programmatic," nor highly structured. But there was enough structure to provide purpose and intention. It was focused upon the participants connecting deeply and honestly. It was guided by David, who prepared and suggested topics and readings, and made logistical arrangements for lodging, travel, and meals. The Omega Initiative met all of the costs, and offered this as a gift [to the church planters]. Miguel, David, and [this researcher] met every other month in person. In between these rendezvous the trio met by videoconference. Occasionally a counselor or spiritual director would join in their fellowship to interact with, probe and guide them.

After eighteen months, Miguel sought to replicate that group experience with a group of church planters in his geographical area. During the period that Miguel's group was meeting, things began to get difficult for him.

At four years in, the church plant had continued to grow, reaching around 200 in attendance. Miguel and the lead team were just starting the process of choosing and training elders. This process began to surface some deficiencies in the preparation and support Miguel had experienced. He had received coaching through his Baptist denomination, but it was all focused on results, tasks, and performance. Miguel reported that coaching did not address the relational challenges he was navigating as they considered things such as gender issues, or how the staff and the elders would relate in terms of authority.

In addition, the church had reached the point where it was not possible for Miguel to have a personal, pastoral relationship with everyone who was attending. He reflected on the things his denomination had provided for him: "It was not that these things were of no

value, but they simply didn't compare to the relationships I had when things were getting started with The Omega Initiative."

It was at this point that Miguel said, "You know my story." The researcher knew that Miguel began to have significant anxieties and fears about navigating certain developmental issues with the church. While meeting with a spiritual director, Miguel mentioned a traumatic childhood incident, which he immediately dismissed as having had little impact on him. But as the spiritual director gently probed, Miguel descended into a season he called his "meltdown." He had paralyzing panic attacks, agoraphobia, shakes, tears, and muscle spasms. At times he could barely speak. He would stutter uncontrollably; he was unable to work. Miguel said that his staff responded with amazing love and grace and stepped in while he took an emergency sabbatical. He said that what struck him most was the effect that his relationships among peers in The Omega Initiative and with his church staff had upon his inner life. Miguel said that through these relationships God provided perspective and helped him process what was going on internally. In his words,

It provided a sense that I was not alone. There were people there to look into my life and see things that I did not see. It's like there are some things in my life that are right here so that I could see them even in my peripheral vision. But then there are things that sit back here, and even if I tried to look at them, it's like they are behind me, and I just can't see them. And you know the metaphor is that someone is across the table or in front of you that can see these things that you just can't see. My relationships were such that I could trust that person, that they were seeing something that I was not. And then I could act on that accordingly. "You know, you have this issue in your life Miguel, and you don't even see it. But you trust me and I will tell you that it is there." And my response was, I trust you. What do I need to do?

Miguel said that these trusted friends and staff demonstrated their commitment to him through their unwillingness to back away from him during this difficult time. These

relationships were a vital part of the healing process and spiritual growth that he experienced. Miguel said that he felt that this entire process had been deeply life giving and healing to him. He said sometimes when he talks about his life before his dark night of the soul it is as though he is talking about somebody else.

Miguel said his staff and his church were models of tenderness and grace throughout this season. They cared for him, continued his salary, and listened to the counsel of his friends in The Omega Initiative. He said that during this time he made no attempt to hide his struggles from Bethel. He remarked upon how rare it is for a church to respond to a pastor in distress in such a loving way. He commented on how frequently churches callously discard a man if he ceases to be useful to them.

While the church lovingly expressed their concern for him, he was also concerned for the church.

What was going to happen to the church? It was incredibly hard when I came to the realization that I wasn't going back, But God was even using that to strengthen the church. Even though we had a number of people leave, there was not a mass exodus. It was really a beautiful time, hilariously beautiful.

Because of his experience, Miguel made a passionate plea that pastors need to abandon their posturing or posing, their attempts to create a shining image of themselves before the congregation as having it together. He acknowledged that it is good to have safe friendships outside the church. Miguel also commented that it is not helpful to lean someone with whom there is a dual relationship, such as when a pastor is shepherding someone in the church.



But Miguel argued this does not give pastors an excuse to hide. He said,

If we do not have people in the church who know our “naked selves”—our vulnerable, unadorned self, as Henri Nouwen called it—if we only have that kind of relationship outside of the church, then we continue to maintain this illusion that it is our job to impress people in our church. I think it is highly problematic when there is a great dichotomy between what I am to church members, and what I am to the guys who really know me.

Miguel observed that there is a form of pastoral hypocrisy that promotes hypocrisy in the church. There is a view among many pastors that to be vulnerable in the way he was might give people a certain picture of them that isn’t favorable.

So [a pastor] can’t really be that honest or that vulnerable with people in the church. They can’t know about this or that. When you start thinking about the sick-headedness of that, it is because of the view that somehow the pastor has to be other worldly.

During what Miguel called his dark night of the soul, he acknowledged that his church, church staff, and Omega Initiative friends all played a role in his journey. He said, “David and [the researcher] relentlessly pursued me, and my heart. In fact, you guys were very instrumental in re-wiring my thinking about revealing my weaknesses, and how important it is as a pastor to be honest with people about that.” Miguel related that when he wanted to back away from his involvement with a new peer group of young church planters, he came to understand how powerfully he had been influenced by the message of our culture. “There is a deep sense that we need to have ourselves together in order to be worthy enough to be part of something like this,” he explained.

When Miguel spoke of the way he felt about his peer relationships during that season of suffering, he said, “We just lived life together. And there was no front or air that I felt that I needed to have.” He spoke of the “relaxed intentionality” of the time among his

peers. He explained that the transformational import of the relationships arose from friendship and connection at the heart level. Miguel contrasted this sense of unity with the way he was coached to approach the church plant.

I sat in isolation and I came up with our mission, our vision, our values, our style, our ethos, and then I invited people to come and join me in that. That is not how [the relationships and focus of] The Omega Initiative came about. The Omega Initiative was, so here's a seed of the idea, now we will figure that out as a community, and we are going to give ourselves the freedom to fail or change direction.

Commenting on this contrast Miguel said, "What I find really interesting—and beautiful—that the essence of The Omega Initiative arose out of relationships."

### *Mark*

Mark is a 30-year-old church planter who has been married to Jennifer for nine years. He attended a private college with a strong and positive history in the Reformed tradition and went directly into ministry afterwards. Mark and Jennifer have two children and are living in Baker, an inner city in the eastern United States. Mark is planting a new church in a low-income urban neighborhood, with government-subsidized housing, heavy crime, and drug addiction. In the last three years since they began the church-planting project, the neighborhood has undergone a radical shift toward gentrification. Change is happening at a rapid pace as young couples, artists, professionals, and hipsters move in. These changes are creating an evolving ministry context. Mark related a critical incident that led him to become involved with the Gathering, a small cohort of men together in a structured peer relationship.

Mark said he had been subconsciously placing his sense of value and acceptance in his ability to achieve and perform in ministry. When he was about one-and-a-half years into the church-planting project, he found his efforts were not making a dent in that difficult context. Things were not moving in the direction he desired, he was spending a great deal of time “fixing” a succession of attacks and frustrations. As a result of his inability to be a “successful pastor,” he was questioning his personal worth, meaning, and identity in Christ. These feelings built up over time and brought him to the point of despair.

While attending a conference of his church-planting network, Mark said the speaker gave a gospel talk that penetrated his heart. Mark said, “He was speaking on the reality of God speaking to Jesus, ‘this is my Son in whom I am well pleased,’” and he went on to say that, “in Christ, God speaks that to us.” Mark wept. Afterwards, he talked with the speaker, who reached out to Mark and invited him to an event called the Gathering. The Gathering was initially a weeklong event with other several other church planters and a small community of leaders in the mountains of Virginia. The Gathering was subsequently extended over four more meetings within one and a half years.

When asked to describe if he had experienced any structured peer relationships, Mark identified the Gathering as the place where he experienced a profound season of spiritual formation within a community of peer relationships. He viewed the Gathering as “a kind of a perfect mix of freedom with structure.” There were sessions in the morning, but the entire afternoon was free “to reflect, refresh, to fellowship.” Mark said, “The other thing I found really valuable was that re-gathering around the table for dinner, and then using that time to reflect on things in community.” The Gathering included fixed hour

prayers, directed interaction, ample time for reflection, and unstructured interaction at meals and afterward.

Mark said that the bucolic setting, the comfortable venue, and the tone of the meals all had a major impact on him.

The beauty of nature for me was huge . . . the rich foods, the good wine and beer, the beautiful surroundings. I struggled because I felt I didn't deserve such lavish treatment. Recognizing that I felt that way was really profound . . . it was a picture of my unwillingness to receive the lavishness of his grace that he wants to spoil me with. And so that aspect of the environment was huge for me.

Mark further described the experience as, "very life giving. It was very refreshing, but it was not easy because God was really doing a work, cutting deep into my heart. The other big thing that happened for me there was gaining a rich understanding of grace."

Mark said it was the first time he really felt he "had a picture of a community walking in line with the gospel, truly reflecting and putting into practice the ramifications of the gospel of grace." That experience of gospel-saturated community also became a model and an example he wants to emulate, according to Mark.

The researcher probed for what Mark learned during this time with the men. Mark answered:

I guess really, truly, and fully resting the whole of my identity in Christ and in the gospel. It's opened up a whole world that God has shown me. I've seen us [the men of the Gathering] working together and learning to apply the gospel to each other. I've begun to realize that I could have the most rich and full theology of the doctrine of salvation and the gospel without ever living it out. That knowledge of the gospel really does not get me very far if I am not applying these rich doctrines to every facet of my life.

Mark said that his experience at the Gathering has started him on a journey of experiencing the gospel instead of just studying it. He is no longer content just reading

systematic theology and trying to gain knowledge in that area; now he desires to be in community and to work through what justification by grace really means in his interactions with God and others.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Mark's experience with his peers at the Gathering is the way Mark feels he was mentored in that small community of men. He commented that the Gathering was the first time that he had seen a true picture of Christian community. He saw the gospel of grace in the way the group interacted with each other, and even "how we confronted each other." He said he learned a lot from watching the group apply the gospel to each other.

What was so rich for me was the aspect that I wasn't just growing through the mentoring of the leaders. It was the whole dynamic of experiencing gospel community with my peers. Experiencing that gospel community and living in it probably had the biggest impact.

As Mark described it, the culture that was created did not have the air of expert teachers tutoring students. Rather, he said, "It truly did feel like I was coming into a context of brothers in Christ. We were walking together, and I was able to glean from those who are wiser than I am." Mark especially highlighted the relational, intentionally unstructured times when the participants were "cooking a meal or sitting on the porch and smoking a pipe. Those times were huge in shaping and mentoring." The fact that there was unstructured time built in does not mean the Gathering does not qualify as a structured peer relationship group. The context was not merely a group of men hanging out and watching a football game together, though such camaraderie was not foreign to the relationships. Rather, the mix of structured and unstructured time at the Gatherings was

quite intentionally designed to allow time for developing relationships. Mark spoke to this intentional aspect in this way:

I think that the culture and how to even be vulnerable and begin to open yourself to be mentored was being imparted [to] us by the leadership exemplifying those qualities. The leaders themselves were vulnerable and honest and candid. Instead of being told this is how we should live, I was being led into that more healthy attitude by example.

The combination of modeling and experience is a powerful means of learning. The encouragement and learning experience extended to Mark's wife Jennifer, too. Mark said Jennifer "absolutely loved the ministry because she saw with each trip how God was continually healing me. He was also breaking me, but growing me through that." Mark also reflected upon the week of the Gathering that included spouses. Before that weekend, Jennifer had been on the outside as Mark enjoyed rich community. But she shared with him that she also struggled,

As much as I've been very alone working as a church planter, Jennifer has also felt very alone as the church planter's wife. And so in some ways she was a little bit jealous of what I was getting to experience because it was something that she herself was deeply hungry for.

The couples' week of the Gathering was "tremendously significant" because it allowed Jennifer to feel more connected to everyone. Mark also said the week was wonderful because it "allowed me to interact with her in the way that I was learning to interact with others at the Gathering. As a result our marriage is a lot more rich and honest. That was very valuable for her, but also for me." He said that experience taught him how to interact with her beyond the husband-wife dynamic. He can now relate to her as his sister in Christ, which has added a deeper dimension to their relationship.

Mark was the only Gathering participant who spoke of this application to his marriage—the way it had changed something fundamental in their communication, similar to what he had experienced among his peers.

*David*

In August, 2008, David (age 40), his wife Elyse, and their two boys moved to a university city in a state in the eastern United States, to help start a new Baptist-affiliated church. In January 2009, they began meeting with a few families in their home, and in June of 2009 they began to meet publicly. Their church is atypical in that it is liturgical; it is growing fairly steadily, but very slowly. David said the church is seeking to “discern our unique voice in our city.” He characterizes the church as made up of a fair number of “spiritual refugees.” He added that, “Most everybody has some kind of Christian background—not everyone, but most everyone—but many of have been distant from the church or disillusioned with their faith. So in some ways, there is a bit of re-evangelizing.”

When asked to describe any structured peer groups in which he had participated, David recalled a short-term experience that impacted him.<sup>360</sup>

It was a group of men guided by two pastoral figures that was intended, in a short and intensive duration, to explore our own stories and how the Gospel intersects with that. It was the most formative group I’ve been in other than just groups of friendships like we have . . . . And I think what made it so formative was just my hunger. I mean, I was really hungry for something. But also I think that it was the men who were leading it. They were very relationally focused, but they also were very—they just were spiritually attuned and very strong. There was something going on besides a curriculum.

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<sup>360</sup> This structured peer group was instrumental in the change of focus David later implemented in the Omega Initiative group.

David said that the modeling he saw in that group setting changed him: “I was so captured by the actual experience and its impact on me that I don’t think I will ever be the same.” David said he personally has little interest in the usual approach to mentoring.

Because I think there are assumptions about how you are supposed to quantify all these things that inherently works against the relational elements that actually give it life. I realize I’m tossing out the window any demand to quantify or map, and I am also very willing to say, this may just be who I am. My eyes almost just glaze over with every form of mentoring manual or book. And it’s not that I think there is no value in it. It’s just that it does not scratch my itch.

David expressed that he finds the focus on relationship transformative, confessing that the church’s “drive toward efficiency is one of our biggest problems.” To that point, David gave a negative example,

Just last week some guy invited me to go to a weeklong leadership retreat. He was selling this sucker hard, talking about how awesome it was. It even had the language of relationship, all kinds of language of relationship. “We are going to get in groups and talk about our story,” the guy said. He used the word story and all the stock phrases that are in vogue now. But at the end of the day he was using the language of relationship to sell something else. And it felt disingenuous, and like it would be an absolute waste of my time—because that’s just not what I am looking for.

On mentoring, David said that for him it is important to identify what kind of mentoring one means. “If you want to be trained in skills, you are going to go one direction. If you want to be mentored in life, you are going to go another direction. That’s what I’m talking about.” When asked what spiritual formation he had experienced in a structured peer group, he described an incident within the group where the pastoral leaders modeled a kind of pastoring he had never seen before, which profoundly formative to him.

Do you remember James? The kind of rock-star guy? He was kind of the one who brought the drama into the group, but in a real subtle kind of a way because he was



a real interesting, cool character. And he kept talking about how his marriage was so hard, and how he had these beautiful, sexy women hitting on him every night. He thought that maybe he did want to just go bang them and be done with it. And marriage is hard, blah, blah, blah. Again, it was kind of, you know, it was kind of cool to listen to his stories because he was flamboyant. I just remember that night when he was saying, you know, maybe I just want to get in my car and go to Vegas. You know, just sow my wild oats again. I remember when George just leaned forward. And George hadn't said a whole lot in that group up to then. And I remember when he looked at James, and just said, James, I am bored out of my mind with your shit. And in that moment, there was a spiritual authority, but there was something that it pierced. Until that point, I had not seen James be quiet and actually pay attention. And for me, experiencing that kind of strength and that kind of engagement was some of the best pastoring I had ever seen. I had seen people do important pastoral things like visit hospitals, and know how to pray with sick people. And you know how to lead a business meeting and all these sorts of skills. But if I hadn't actually been in the room when that happened . . . it's not something that could have ever been described to me. At least I couldn't have felt the impact of it in the same way if I hadn't actually experienced that moment. And also, I think what is interesting about it, is that it is not something that you could have possibly reproduced.

David said, "There are certain kinds of things you can only learn by actually experiencing. You can't make it happen. You can't manufacture it. You couldn't craft a curriculum so as to induce this moment." He said that his conviction about this is likely the reason he hasn't had many mentoring relationships. He categorized most mentoring attempts as too formulaic—"The eight skills they want to walk me through." David described what he is seeking:

I am hungry for pastoral mentors who know how to engage the complexities of life and relationship where there isn't a predisposed end. But the goal is not a line you cross, but the goal is actually, have you had an authentic encounter with one another?

David's back-story helps to explain this hunger and rejection of mentoring that is only about skills and results. The first church David worked for had regular staff meetings. "I guess that was kind of our mentoring time as pastors," he said. But the effect on David

was far from positive. “There was no relationship. It was all agenda. There was manipulation. Nobody put their cards on the table. The pastor used us as his resources to get things done,” he recounted. David said he assumed the pastor thought these meetings were very efficient.

At the end of the day, we had our marching orders and were told what to do. And I guess we were being trained in certain ministry skills to accomplish ministry tasks. But I could not wait to get out of there. And I couldn’t trust that man as far as I could toss him. And we didn’t pray.

According to David, the pastor taught him nothing about what it means to pray or to pastor. He summed up his frustration by saying, “So now I look back on that and I’m like, what the hell were they doing? What were we doing?”

David does consider a mentoring relationship he has with a well-known Christian author to be transformative. David said he has pursued this relationship not only because of what he can learn about writing, but also because his mentor isn’t checking off a how-to-do-it list during their time together.

He’s not giving me anything other than himself. He doesn’t have material to give me. He doesn’t even have like seven truths he wants to make sure I get. There is no agenda; it is very inefficient. He’s not giving me the quickest way to get from A to Z. It’s just his own presence in my life.

David evaluates would-be mentors by asking whether their desire is “to give people life with Jesus and make them more of who they were meant to be? Or to use them for some other purpose? It doesn’t take you long to know which is which.” David also suggested those who desire to be mentored examine their own motives.

The question for us is what do we want? Do we want to play the same kind of game, but just reverse it? Do we want to use a mentor to just to learn skills so that we can

get on with what we want to do? Or do we actually want to receive what this person has to give us from Jesus?

### *Sandy*

Sandy is 38, a church planter in an eastern state affiliated with the Baptist denomination. He serves as lead teaching pastor at NewChurch for four years. Mary, his wife, is mother to their two children and the couple works very closely together in the ministry. Sandy went directly into ministry following his undergraduate work, as is common in his denomination.

During the five years prior to planting NewChurch, he served as an associate pastor, youth pastor, and college pastor in another part of the state. Before then, he served as a fulltime solo pastor for two years. Sandy's current responsibilities include regular preaching, teaching, and overseeing staff and the church as a whole, Sandy did not attend graduate theological seminary, but he is a pastor's son, and was closely mentored for five years by a wise and godly pastor.

Sandy has experienced various forms of mentoring during different stages of his ministry career.

Initially the mentoring I encountered was from godly couples who were a little bit older than me that were attending the church and kind of took me under their wings. It was very informal, a lot of one-on-one.

He said that sometimes he and his wife would meet with other couples, "walking with them . . . learning how to study the word, how to teach the word. How to mentor younger people as we started youth ministry, how to deal with conflict, things of that

nature.” As time passed, senior pastor he served under initiated a more deliberate, intentional form of professional and pastoral mentoring. This was an overwhelmingly positive experience for Sandy.

He was just an amazing man and an amazing mentor who really took me under his wing and began to teach me a lot about pastoral ministry, about shepherding, about the church as a whole, and what it means to be a pastor. The majority of my formation took place under his direct leadership and just walking with him through life.

This particular mentor taught Sandy practical pastoral skills, but also about living life as a believer and young leader. Then a significant issue in the church created a live learning experience. Sandy shared a critical incident in this church context that provided a more focused type of mentoring, as they found themselves embroiled in a huge conflict the likes of which they had not yet experienced.

An inappropriate relationship of emotional dependence developed within the church, and Sandy and his wife felt conscience-bound to call for the member’s discipline. As a consequence they became the focal point of a tumultuous church conflict. They, along with the senior pastor, were personally attacked, and became the subject of much gossip. Sandy was accused of financial improprieties, and was sued for defamation of character by one of the parties in the inappropriate relationship. Sandy said he learned humility and how to stand for what is right without besmirching another’s testimony. The senior pastor was a model of humility and of unwavering commitment to Sandy and his wife throughout the ordeal. This was a powerfully shaping experience for Sandy. The senior pastor’s trustworthiness and vulnerability were particularly formative for him. Sandy reflected on this experience,

I never really had a close relationship with my father growing up. He was a pastor, and I have always kind of viewed pastors in a different light. And so to encounter a man like my former pastor who was very loving, very nurturing and very concerned about my soul care as well as being very spiritually formative in my life, that was very different for me. And it was very enriching in a lot of ways. I considered it a kind of Paul and Timothy relationship; he was a spiritual father to me as well as a guy I would go to about personal things in my family or whatever. And so the chemistry was very much a father-son chemistry. I had a sense of family;[there was] a sense of respect and love and care for one another.”

A third season in Sandy’s mentoring took place in the context of a cohort of five men and four facilitators called The Gathering, which was an initiative of The Omega Initiative. All of these men were ministry peers, but ranged in age from a few years younger, to twenty-three years older than Sandy.

Sandy’s testimony is that the two years he spent with the Gathering was “life-altering,” in terms of spiritual formation. In particular, Sandy said he learned how to listen, to not presume he knew what the other was saying, and to “move past the need to prove my point or to make my argument.” This aspect of listening more carried over to his relationship to God as well. He now tries to perceive how God would direct him, “instead of just going headstrong into a situation thinking that I know the right solution or right way.” Sandy admitted that when he was young in ministry, he used to operate in that way, with a “this is the path, let’s go grab the bull by the horns” mentality.

Sandy said that the spiritual impact of the relationships of the Gathering was directly related to the fact that he felt completely safe there. As much as he trusted and respected the senior pastor who had mentored him, he said,

I had never fully opened up to him in the way that I have with the mentors and the men in The Omega Initiative. That to me is the deepest level of trust in my life, as well as the most healing and most refreshing. It was one of those seasons where I

could be completely me without worrying about how it might come back around, so to speak.

He described the chemistry with the men in The Omega Initiative as more of a brotherly role. They could be playful with one another, they could celebrate, they could laugh, or they could cry. He said the men related to one another as peers, despite the range of ages, and they could share the exact same kind of struggles because they were on the same page.

The researcher asked Sandy to name what was most helpful and formative as a result of the relationships and interactions of the Gathering: “Certainly it would be the experience of feeling complete acceptance, of stepping from shadow into light. And this desire to live authentically and to pursue a healthy walk with Christ has always been our desire and part of our church plant.” He said that what he experienced in the Gathering community was what they were seeking in their ministry. But he explained that they never really felt fully able to live that until experiencing it with The Omega Initiative.

And experiencing that with our first Gathering was confirmation that living authentically is do-able. But it was more than that. I came to the conclusion that I can’t live without this. It’s not just cool; it’s something I’ve got to have.

Sandy said that these relationships had greatly strengthened him for his calling as a pastor. He described the formative nature of the relationships in terms of the way he felt he had been mentored in the context of the peer relationships in the Gathering. Sandy described that process as,

We walked with four other very godly men who kind of took us under their wings, me and some other pastors from around the country. And they really began to mentor us, especially in the area of grace and freedom and our identity in Christ. And we specifically to walk in that, as opposed to just memorizing concepts and principles and doing daily devotionals. It was really a life altering, ninety-degree

turn. Those two years have been the most instrumental as far as shaping me and how I pastor and act with people and how I journey with people even now.

Sandy said he realized “that there is value in voices across the spectrum. I no longer think, alright, I’ve got to go to this person because they are older and wiser. Or I need to go to this person because they are on my level and they will understand me better.” He was surprised by the way the Lord spoke to his heart through this range of voices and perspectives.

He said that he had been at one church where sharing personal challenges was discouraged. The unspoken rule was that you must “keep everything close to the chest and don’t share.” This atmosphere felt suffocating and unhealthy and like death to Sandy. He has also seen the other extreme where there are no checks and balances and anything goes, realized that is not healthy either. Having experienced the two extremes, he appreciated the environment of the Gathering all the more. He cherishes those “mentors and people who are willing to love you enough to be real with you even when it doesn’t feel good. But yet in that to still find love and acceptance; I don’t think you can put a value on that.”

Sandy reflected on the things that he is imparting to his children, and what he hopes to impart to them as they mature.

I keep thinking of what I’m going to pass onto them someday. When I think of all of it to this point in my life, the one thing I hope I can pass onto them—and anyone else I get to talk to about being a follower of Christ—is the concept that there is no greater thing than authentic friendships.

A major theme that surfaced in Sandy’s story was a deep hunger to be known. He also expressed that a significant reason these peer relationships had such impact was the environment itself. Sandy said before his first Gathering, he envisioned a classroom setting.

The reality turned out to be “the exact opposite. It felt like I was sitting in a living room with family or loved ones, having a conversation about my soul.” There was give and take among the facilitators and participants. Facilitators did not arrive with the intention of covering a set body of material or dumping a lot of data on participants; the agenda was flexible by design.

Sandy struggled to articulate the level of trust in the group, finally settling on the words essential, complete, and thorough. He explained that he had not experienced such trust before and added, “I have yet to fully experience it after. Just a complete place of safety and confidence in each other, that was huge. Absolutely huge.” He said the tone was set in the first couple days of conversations.

At the very first sit down, we had to see how it was handled and processed and essentially just built on each conversation after that. It just made me want to be even more vulnerable and more open. And that was big. That was absolutely, absolutely essential.

When researcher asked if there was anything Sandy would like to add, Sandy said meeting regularly as a group over an extended period of time was a key component. Originally the Gathering was slated to be a one-time meeting, but its timeframe was later extended.

Being able to do it for a couple of years, a couple of times each year, that really solidified it. My wife and I used to say it was almost God’s timing. When I would start to have a big struggle or challenge come up or when I just need to get away, it was right in timing with me going away to the Gathering. If I had only had that initial week and then didn’t have any continuing relationships or follow-ups out of that. . . . For me the relationships were solidly formed that week, but they really grew in what took place after that week. That was really instrumental.



Sandy expressed that despite the fears and the anxieties that come with entering into a journey of baring your soul, the benefits are well worth the risk. His experience of walking with this group of men in honesty and community led him to say, “It would be foolish to pass up an opportunity to enter into something this healthy and this life-giving. It has changed my perception of me, of my ministry, of other people, and even my relationship with God.”

The researcher also asked how his spouse was affected by his involvement in these relationships. Sandy said his wife Mary was highly supportive of his participation in the two-year Gathering experience. She had observed the toll that ministry was taking on him, and realized he had no one he could to bear his soul in their ministry setting. Both Sandy and his wife realized that there are things she cannot offer him; Mary understood she could do some things to encourage him, but that he needed peer relationships as well. He noted that men and women often process things differently, and that they carry different kinds of burdens. He said that Mary’s attendance at the one Gathering where spouses were invited “cemented the value of the group for her, because she saw the connections we had with each other.” Sandy spoke primarily of the value his wife saw for him, but acknowledged that it left her wanting more. She was drawn to a couple of the women, but did not have the opportunity to develop those relationships.

#### *Brad*

Brad and Katherine live in a mid-sized metropolitan city in the mid-west. Brad, 45, is lead pastor of City Church (PCA), which is one site in a multi-site congregation of

approximately three hundred. City Church serves their ethnically diverse community with two worship services and a range of mercy and evangelistic ministries. Brad has served the congregation for five years. Prior to receiving his call to City Church, he was an associate pastor in a western state for four years, and served on the staff of an evangelical seminary for eight years before that.

Initially Brad said he hadn't been formally mentored, explaining, "I have never been in a relationship where there was a declared intention of someone saying, 'I will mentor you, you will be my mentor.'" However, he said he always had relationships with older, wiser leaders he respected who poured into his life, going back all the way to high school. Brad explained that he has had some sort of informal mentoring

Every place I have been, whether it has been in college doing youth ministry, at the seminary, or here in the west, I still have someone like that in my life to this day. There is no way I could imagine surviving, enduring, persevering in life and ministry without having guys who are farther down the road who have been examples for me and who have kind of led me along the way.

Brad added that these men challenged him in terms of growing in wisdom and discernment. Further distinguishing between his early experiences of being mentored, he added that when he was an associate pastor in the western community, much of what his senior pastor offered him would more correctly be called "coaching." Brad explained, "Some of it was related to ministry development, natural things like preaching, leading worship, weddings, funerals, pastoral care, and that sort of stuff. But he also spoke to me about life and family." In his current situation, Brad is blessed with an unusual level of support built into the team of leaders of the churches that make up the multi-site

congregation. The leadership team prays and processes ministry issues together. Those who have been engaged in ministry for decades longer than Brad frequently offer him guidance.

Moving to the present, Brad says that he would characterize the nature of the Pastors Summit cohort he is involved in as, “pretty much lateral, peer relationships with the exception of your role in the group, I guess.” Here he referred to the researcher, who is facilitator of that cohort and therefore a researcher-participant. “But that has been a good thing—hanging out with guys who are at a similar place in ministry, and in family life. It’s also good that we have no formal working ministry relationship.”

Brad says that the Pastors Summit group is different because it is a place to go and just be with his peers. He says having a church staff connection “defines the relationship in some ways. Though his Pastors Summit group has only met three times or four times, Brad says it has been “good” and he is “encouraged and hopeful for where it is going to go.”

Brad’s experience of spiritual formation in the context of peer relationships was explored through the interview questions. Brad did not relate any prior involvement in a group of peers during the critical incident he described; however the individuals and the situation taught him much.

I have learned so much, but an important part of it is just that who you are, the good, the bad, the ugly, the strengths, the weaknesses inevitably get expressed in ministry and in relationships. Some of the most challenging aspects of ministry are the relationships between those who are in ministry together. I think that there is just a natural element in that relationships are hard.

Brad believes a spiritual warfare element is also involved in the context of ministry. “When the devil schemes to bring division in the church, he is going to go for the leaders,” he said. One thing he has learned through these relational challenges has been the

importance of “not giving up on hopes and dreams and ideals in terms of what relationships can be, but also not abandoning the relationships in ministry when they do not live up to the ideals.” Brad spoke of endurance and perseverance, “not just in relation to tasks and works, but in relationships.”

The critical incident Brad related concerned his season as associate pastor serving with his senior pastor. He was evidently sincere when he spoke of his love and respect for the man. He related how hard he and his senior pastor worked at their relationship; both of their wives also worked hard at the relationship between the couples. Brad did not minimize the fact that it was at times painful, but he said that the relationship remained committed and loving.

Some of my best memories of ministry and life were there, but there were definitely times when it was clear that the senior pastor was going about something in a way that was different than I would. At one point he got one or two other elders involved to help us out. I think that it is a gospel victory in the end because there is still a lot of love and respect. Neither one of us bolted or “divorced” the other at those times.

Brad said that walking through some of the difficulties in a ministry relationship was draining, even though there was a good, mutually respectful, loving outcome. One result of all this difficult relational work was that it gave him a greater love and appreciation for his wife, because they were “in it together.” What became real to him through this time was “that we are committed to one another going into all of this; we are committed to each another in the middle of it; we will be committed to each another on the back end of it.” Even in the places where he felt most alone, he was grateful “to have a wife and a marriage where I did not feel alone.” He also realized that “God is using it all,” even as he was in the midst of the situation. “One of my prayers has always been that God

would do in me what he needs to, to make me the man he wants me to be,” Brad said. “He is using these things as much as anything else.”

In the midst of the challenges just described, there was a ruling elder who played an important mentoring role for Brad. This man was important to Brad “not so much in terms of ministry development,” but in terms of being a husband and being a dad. This elder modeled an example of fatherhood that Brad wanted to emulate. In making this distinction, Brad identified his need and desire for more than coaching and ministry skills and know-how. He was looking for models, those who showed him what it looked like to live out his faith and have it expressed in his relationships as husband, father and friend.

As the researcher sought to discover any mentoring that had taken place in Brad’s life through structured peer relationships, it is quite significant to note that even with his current team support structure and his history of seeking mentors, Brad finds a dynamic in the cohort of peers in the Pastors Summit that he finds nowhere else. This is true even though there is a high level of collegiality, humility, prayerfulness, and unity among the staff of his present pastorate.

Brad postulated that the relationships he has with peers through the Pastors Summit have a special quality precisely because the participants don’t work together in the same ministry context. He has learned through experience that ministry relationships are very complex.

I just think in a fallen world, there is a challenge of mentoring relationships that are dual or triple layer relationships. If you have a mentor relationship and a staff-employee relationship, and maybe even a friend relationship, all of that gets mixed in. It gets complicated.

Brad has many dual and triple layer relationships in his current role as the lead pastor. He notes that although tension and conflict are not always going to be present, they are inevitable at some time in every ongoing relationship. Yet, Brad says,

...the gospel, the promises of God, and the fact that Jesus is the head of the church all give us freedom to walk through those difficult times with confidence and not to give up, not to put our hope in ourselves in terms of figuring this out.

One of the clear themes in Brad's remarks is that even where there are close friendships and godly effort put forth toward love, humility and unity in a ministry context, there is the inescapable reality of dual or even triple layer relationships. This complexity is absent in a cohort of peers who are outside the pastor's ministry context. In this context a pastor can be known without the added layers of elder, staff or employee relationships.

Brad also said that as a pastor he sought out men who could teach him about life, men whose marriages and parenting he wanted to emulate. It is most interesting to note that the hunger and relationships that Brad described had little to do with, and even downplayed the importance of actual ministry skills and strategic matters. He did not say these were unnecessary or unimportant, but they were in a distant second place to the need for meaningful, life-giving relationships that helped him to learn and grow in life, in marriage and as a dad.

### *Rick*

Rick is the Senior Pastor of Centennial Presbyterian Church, a congregation of the PCA in a suburban mid-western city. Rick is 38, married to Jamie, with three children. He has been in his current position five years, and leads a staff of three associate and assistant

pastors. Before coming to Centennial, Rick served in another state for approximately two years as an associate pastor in the same denomination.

Rick's staff at Centennial enjoys a good level of peer encouragement. The church is well-known in the denomination and has a godly but aging oversight board, though it has recently become more generationally diverse with the addition of several members who are in earlier seasons of career and family life. He describes his relationship with the session that was in place when he arrived five years ago as supportive and kind. That relationship is also a bit similar to his relationship with his father or grandfather, in that there is basic difference in outlook and life experience because they are in different stages of life. There is also a significant difference in worldview between the session and the millennial generation coming up in the church.

He describes a collegial spirit and sense of unity among his staff. But he contrasts those relationships from the group of peers he has outside the context of his own church. Rick said, "There are certainly times when being the boss gets in the way. There are certain things I am not going to confide, certain things I am not going to talk about." But he also says there is some "relief from the loneliness of ministry simply by being with other guys you can sit and shoot the breeze with in their office, even if it is not a deep conversation." Rick is aware that he has more peer relationships than many men who are involved in church planting.

When asked to describe any structured peer relationships of which he has been a part he related two different instances, one from his years as an associate pastor and his current participation in a Pastors Summit cohort.

Rick's early involvement with a group of peers in a structured setting was while he served as an associate pastor. Following an annual two-day presbytery retreat, Rick was invited to join a group of seven other young pastors. Most were associated with the PCA, but they were all from different churches, which gave them a certain freedom to talk honestly with one another. The group met for about two hours, approximately monthly, over a two-year period.

The group was facilitated by one of its members, who volunteered to coordinate, bring a guided prayer sheet, send emails, and generally make the meetings happen. The men would read the Psalms together, talk about what was happening in their lives, and pray. As time went by, the facilitator asked different men to come prepared to guide the time. The aim of the group was primarily encouragement and accountability, which Rick said did happen within the group. It was an encouraging time for him.

When asked about the level of trust that existed in the group, Rick said,

I think the trust level was decent for a bunch of guys who were just getting together. We weren't really going into deep and dark stuff. So I don't know what the scale of trust was. There probably is no scale out there. But if ten is bearing your soul to people, we were probably at about a six. Probably better than your average small group.

However, Rick said that the group had not been framed as a place where vulnerability and honesty were among the aims of the time. He said that there was "a willingness to be somewhat open," and that it was honest, but not that vulnerable. When asked if any close relationships resulted from the time, Rick said, "Not Really."

Rick is part of an ongoing Pastors Summit cohort, and he identified the Summit as the second place where he has experienced a structured peer relationship. This group has



been meeting approximately monthly for three hours. Some of the meetings have been as pastoral couples in the evenings, with a meal prepared by the facilitator's wife, who is a personal chef. While not elaborate, the meals have a touch of real quality, are well-prepared, and are accompanied by wine, flowers, music and candles. It is a lingering time of sharing, followed by a brief directed time together as couples. Afterwards, there is a breakout time when the men and women meet separately to share what is happening in their lives and ministries. This group is made up of two church planters, two senior pastors, the facilitator, and a student researcher. Rick said of this cohort, "there is trust in the room." Furthermore,

There is an acceptance and even a kinship there that I sense. It seems like there is a desire to be vulnerable. My sense is that a couple of guys would be willing to go deeper if they had opportunity. There have been moments of surprising honesty and vulnerability.

Rich said that he felt the group was willing to be vulnerable because there was a shared sense that "we need this" rather than a demand to go deep and be vulnerable. But having a safe place to be vulnerable is the stated goal, which was not the case in the previous group. Rick said that the previous group was framed as "let's get together, encourage one another, and read Scripture together." He said that group was wonderful, but the Summit group went deeper faster.

Rick was asked to share a critical incident, one that had shaped him positively or negatively and whether he had any peer relationships at that time that were part of that shaping or formative season. Rick shared a difficult experience, and that he did not have a group of trusted peer relationships at that time.

When Rick came to Centennial, there was an interim pastor who was also a personal friend. They had been seminary colleagues and were friends as couples. Rick said that they thought they had worked through all the potential pitfalls of working together and that they were prepared for what could potentially go wrong. But a number of significant differences surfaced between them. It was also increasingly evident that there were differences between the interim pastor's vision and sense of calling and the session's sense of those things. Rick took the lead and made the decision to ask the associate to seek another call elsewhere. Rick said that it was an extremely difficult time over several months, and the friendship between the families was affected. In addition, a week after the announcement regarding his associate, Rick also had to announce to the congregation that one of the elders was coming under discipline for immorality. Rick reflected, "So, um, that was a bad week . . . or two. You know, the Lord actually met us in that moment in a really cool way. But it was a pretty rough go."

Rick said that he reached out to people during the crisis and they were quite helpful. But Rick felt isolated and alone because of the nature of his relationships with the interim pastor and the elder. Making this more difficult was the fact that he felt his session did not stand strong with him during the ordeal. Rick explained,

There is a difference between your session having your back and making a hard decision as the shepherds of the church and the elders owning that. There is a difference between that and people saying "I support Rick and I support what he's doing." One of those stances says, "This is our decision. You can't put this on him. This is ours. We made this together." The other says, "I am loyal to my pastor." Well, that is just a different message.

This response from the session made Rick feel especially alone. All during this time he did not have a group of peers outside the church who were there for him, praying with

him, processing events, and supporting him. When asked if he had any spiritually formative relationships during that time, he said, “I didn’t have them. I just didn’t have them.”

Rick said he felt that it would have made a difference if he had been involved in a group of peers during this difficult time, that he would have had some place to turn for emotional support besides his wife and his mentors. But at the time he simply did not have that kind of support. Despite this fact, in God’s providence, this series of events was formative for him and marked a change in his relationship with the church. Rick said the difficulty, even without that emotional support, did an internal work in him as a pastor. He was heartbroken over the situation with the elder and his wife in the church; he was also emotionally raw and physically spent. Rick said he had struggled over the prior two years to really feel connected to the church, to feel like their pastor. But then he had to announce the discipline against this elder who was being removed from office.

He labored over the words, but still did not know what to say. He did not know how the news was going to be received. When he made the announcement, he became very emotional “in front of everybody.” As he reflected on the announcement later that evening he realized there had been a breakthrough.

I felt like okay, I am their pastor. And I am going to walk with them through this. This is our issue. I felt like the staffing issue was pretty much mine, because most of the people did not know what was going on. So they were going to have to just trust me on that one. The elder issue was different. Everyone was angry, sad, and heartbroken, the whole thing. We were all grieving this thing together. And I think in that moment, I just felt like, by virtue of being obviously emotional about the whole thing, I invited them to a healthy response. I felt in that moment as I went home that night, that this is what it means to be a pastor. I sensed that connection together, that we are really going to care for one another through this and care for the couple that was struggling.

All through this season of difficulty Rick had no one walking with him; however, did get a chance to process those events with a wise and gracious man he met almost immediately after that difficult two weeks. The man was the speaker at a conference he and Jamie had plans to attend far before the difficulties were in progress. "I was pastored during that time. I needed to be," Rick said. During the conference, Rick had the opportunity to process the challenging situations he had just walked through with this wise man in a setting far away from the conflict and strain; there Rick was able to gain perspective and to find rest and make peace with his decisions and the resulting fallout.

The need Rick felt to receive pastoral care himself in that difficult time is tremendously important to note. It reveals that pastors themselves often do not have a pastor, peer or otherwise, who is there to walk with and care for them when they are hurting. Rick had a caring session but they were shouldering their own burdens and hurt over the situation.

The hunger Rick expressed was not only for a pastor to walk with him when he was hurting, but also for a place where he could be known and be vulnerable with people he could trust.

### **Missouri Summit Focus Group**

The Missouri Summit is composed of eleven couples, plus student researchers (Brian and Rebecca Brown from Covenant Theological Seminary), and this researcher and my spouse as facilitators. The eleven couples are split between two cohorts and were still meeting at the conclusion of this research project. Among the cohorts are two churches

with a senior pastor and an associate or assistant pastor participating in two separate cohorts. One of these churches is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) congregation, and the other is affiliated with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). The student researchers and a participant couple in Cohort B represent a third PCA church. All told, there are nine PCA couples, two EPC couples, and one couple from the Acts 29 Network.

Cohort A includes four couples (plus the researcher couple and the facilitator couple); all are either senior pastors or church planters. Cohort B is a mix of two solo pastors, five staff members (assistants or associates and one staff intern with a fair bit of experience), plus the researcher couple and the facilitator couple. The size of the latter group makes it a challenge to have enough time to get around the circle, get current, share prayer concerns, and still have time for any content to be discussed.

### *Facilitation and Format*

Missouri Summit cohorts have experimented with a shorter, more frequent format compared to previous best practices of the Pastors Summit. The original Pastors Summit met three times per year for two days over a period of two years. The format for the local Summit is a three-hour meeting ten times per year for two years. This researcher and Karen Baldwin facilitate the Missouri Summit cohorts (Karen facilitates for the women when the cohorts meet as couples). Karen has been the spouse of a pastor, a missionary, and a church planter for over thirty years. Eric Hendricks co-facilitated the first cohort meetings for the men. Eric is a counselor in private practice in an eastern state and is on the board

of The Omega Initiative, Eric and this researcher have worked together for over two years in the context of that ministry and in a similar cohort for church planters. Eric was asked to help set the tone and to create a climate where commitment, transparency and trust got off to a strong start; as a result the cohorts began to go deeply early on. Brian and Rebecca Brown are students at Covenant Theological Seminary and serve both cohorts as paid student researchers. They are active and valuable participant-researchers, assisting the facilitators with group dynamics, debriefing meetings, and logistics.

As of this writing the cohorts have met six times, including twice as couples. These meetings have been four hours in length. The evening begins around a nice meal prepared by Karen Baldwin, who is a trained chef. The Missouri Summit seeks to keep travel, meals, and lodging costs low, and to make the meetings accessible for participants. All of the cohort couples are local, with most traveling no more than twenty miles, and one coming from approximately seventy-five miles away.

The kickoff time was for the men only. They first met in their cohorts in September 2011 and as mentioned, the researcher invited a counselor to co-facilitate for the first several meetings.

### **Kick-off**

Eric introduced the cohorts to a trust-time continuum, explaining to the group that it is possible to build trust quickly if they are willing to be vulnerable, and to take risks. An important initial observation in this process was that the facilitators, Eric and this researcher, consciously invited the participants into an existing relationship of trust

between themselves, and so were able to model the aims of vulnerability and risk for the cohorts. The trust level has increased over each meeting.

Each participant was supplied with a nice journal in which to jot ideas, take notes, and recorded prayer concerns of other cohort members. Cohort members have chosen to read three books together. The purpose is not to discuss book content in-depth, but rather to seed conversations; and offer important frames and paradigms for spiritual formation, self-care, marriage and family, emotional and cultural intelligence, and leadership and management. Books that were chosen thus far are: *The Leader's Journey*, by Herrington, Creech and Taylor; and *Emotionally Healthy Church* and *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, by Peter and Geri Scazzero.

As the cohorts have interacted with scripture, readings, and with another, the members have made progress in establishing relationships. One participant noted that after the third gathering, his group had moved beyond sizing each other up and moved closer towards being real with one another.

It is also clear that the men are comfortable getting out of their pastoral role. They have embraced the idea that this is a meeting where they are not expected to lead, though they are expected to be fully present and to contribute. They are comfortable with the facilitator, and have given him permission to lead them, and to set direction for the group.

### **Participant Comments**

Members of the two separate, Missouri Summit, who have been given pseudonyms, made the following comments:

Andy, who is a participant in cohort A, described his current ministry role as “an outsider among insiders” in contrast to a previous ministry setting where he was “an insider among outsiders.” He serves in a congregation that has many qualities of a First Church. A number of well-known pastors have served the congregation in its long history, and the church enjoys a measure of prestige and influence in the local area. Andy described his experience with the Missouri Summit as “a great blessing” to him.

I believe friendships are being forged that will sustain me in ministry. I don't want to romanticize the time. There have been frustrations and trust has not been instantaneous; but I find myself looking forward to our time together each month, and that is no small feat.

John is a senior pastor in cohort B, the mixed cohort that includes staff pastors and an intern. He and his wife were among the sixty-one couples who participated in the original Pastors Summit initiative. When asked why he has chosen to be part of the Missouri Summit, John replied, “I need this,” and explained why the relationships he is forming in the group are so hard to develop elsewhere.

One of the hard things about building relationships with other pastors is that you typically only see one another at quarterly denominational meetings. That's no way to build real connections. The Missouri Summit gives me a place to connect with other guys who are going through the same sort of things I'm going through, and it gives me a way to handle those shared experiences redemptively rather than just being a gripe session or having a polite "sharing time.”

Harold is part of cohort B. He is on the pastoral staff at another local church with a long history; the senior pastor who served just before the current pastor was there for many years and had significant stature in his denomination. Harold has oversight for a broad range of ministries in the church. He commented on the benefits he has reaped from participating in the Missouri Summit thus far:



The Summit has given me a safe place to reflect on issues I've been facing in my own church and to gain new categories for how to process those issues. I've been working a lot on being a non-anxious presence in meetings, and recognizing my tendency to be a contrarian.

It has given me the opportunity to learn a lot from senior pastors: the pressures of preaching every Sunday and how that can affect the weekly schedule; coping with a death in the congregation; how to handle a disgruntled member, etc.

Another member of Cohort B serves as an associate in a church that is experiencing a season of difficulty because their senior pastor has been the focus of controversy. Andy has great respect for his pastor, but they are both feeling considerable strain, and the church is suffering. As stated above, the group of which Andy is part has nine participants including the researcher and student researcher. Andy says,

The Missouri Summit has been encouraging for me. It's been great to deepen some friendships with local pastors and be encouraged in my own work. I'm also gaining outside perspectives into my own call and situation from men who are sympathetic and care about me personally.

Andy has felt the pinch of time constraints in cohort B and feels that it is a function of the group being too large. He said the larger group size "makes it difficult to get to know one another in real depth." He is less interested in a teaching component or in discussing books as part group meetings.

A member of cohort A, Eric is part of a multi-site church in an urban mid-western context. Eric is one of the older participants and has significant experience in ministry. He shared some reflections about his Missouri Summit experience, so far:

The Pastors Summit has provided me with a wonderful place to "step back" from the day-to-day and week-to-week press of pastoral ministry. I'm able to join fellow pastors in an environment of mutual encouragement, reflection, prayer, and discovery. I've come away from our gatherings with a renewed sense of hopefulness for how Jesus is growing his church and also a sense of camaraderie with others who are laboring in the gospel ministry. I've also come away with some good ideas

for ministry and learned about valuable resources that I had not known about before. The times we have met with our spouses have been very refreshing for both my wife and me. The combination of fellowship with others who are in a similar place and the incredible food and hospitality has become something we look forward to with anticipation.

The current iteration of the Pastors Summit, called the Missouri Summit, has brought together elements of the Gathering (as described by participants Sandy and Mark), with the findings of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE). The Gathering is much more clearly focused on spiritual direction and time for reflection than the original model of the Pastors Summit, which included a significant element of continuing education, including key readings and teaching times. The Missouri Summit initiative continues to confirm that pastoral couples hunger for and have a real need for a safe place among their peers. The comments above combined with the findings of the participant interviews establish the fact that pastoral couples want a place where they can be out of role, a place where they are not required to lead, where they can simply “be” and enjoy mutual friendship. They recognize that these friendships are different, in that they do not have the complexity and potential conflict of the dual role that pastors have with their staff members or lay leadership. The participants also express appreciation for being cared for as they serve in a calling that is full of relational conflicts and competing interests, and that involves them in constantly caring for others. They also express appreciation for having a place where they are among people they can trust, who genuinely understand their world. The spouses of pastors say this is especially true for them, and that they truly have no other such place.

In this chapter, six pastors’ stories were reviewed, noting especially their experience of spiritual formation and mentoring in structured peer relationships. A brief focus group

interview provided a glimpse of the progress and responses to the Missouri Summit in progress at this writing.

The six stories and the focus group are all linked together over an eight-year period. Two participants came from the first iteration of The Omega Initiative's structured peer relationship. Two participants came from the third iteration of that initiative, called the Gathering. Two participants came from the most recent Pastors Summit initiative, called the Missouri Summit. Within this period a progression unfolds in which both research and practice have shaped and formed improved practices in structured peer relationships. These stories represent an important body of data that is recorded in this study. Findings are presented in the following chapter.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of this research was to explore how emerging pastoral leaders develop in spiritual formation through structured peer relationships. Analysis of the data from interviews with six pastor participants is organized under the following research questions:

4. What structured peer relationships did emerging pastoral leaders participate in after their pre-ministry preparation years?
5. What spiritual formation did emerging pastoral leaders experience in structured peer relationships after their pre-ministry preparation years?
6. What mentoring did emerging pastoral leaders experience through structured peer relationships after their pre-ministry preparation years?

*Lessons Learned*

The results of the interview process were analyzed using the research questions. The following themes were discovered:

**Structured Peer Relationships: Relationships are Primary**

For the purpose of this study, structured peer relationships describe the relationships formed among “a group of six to eight peers in pastoral ministry who have committed to meet together for the purpose of mutual encouragement and spiritual growth.” The six participants had all been part of a variety of structured peer relationships as broadly defined above, but they also described variations within that model. The primary difference was between those peer groups that were predominantly results oriented and those that were predominantly relationship oriented.

Rick described a relational group he said was, “mutually supportive and encouraging,” but had a “shallow” trust level.

I think the trust level was decent for a bunch of guys who were just getting together. We weren't really going into deep and dark stuff. So I don't know what the scale of trust is. There probably is no scale out there. But if ten is bearing your soul to people, we were probably at about a six.

As noted in the previous chapter, David described a peer relationship between the senior pastor and pastoral staff that was exclusively focused upon results. He said, “There was no relationship. It was all agenda. There was manipulation. Nobody put their cards on the table.”

Commenting on that tendency toward task and results, Rick said,

I tend to be fairly utilitarian in my relationships; so I think it's good for me to learn not to be that way, to not say it's useful because when you need it, it will be there. But just to walk together, enjoy life together is something that really needs to be intentionally worked into life because I know that I don't make the time for that naturally.

Miguel described the “coaching” of his denominational church-planting network as, “more that most guys have.” Miguel explained that some pastors from his church-planting network would get together for an extended meeting that included an overnight. His assessment was that those meeting were helpful, but something less than ideal. “I think they did as good a job as they could have done,” he said.

All of the pastors stressed the primacy of the peer relationships, but Mark's words show that these relationships were instrumental in giving him a fresh hold on the gospel. He says of his experience in the group,

It was very life giving. It wasn't just relaxation. It was very refreshing, but it was not easy because God was really doing a work, cutting deep into my heart. So I was able to leave relaxed and refreshed but also with a lot to chew on because God was revealing so much to me in those times. And I think the other big thing that happened for me there was gaining a rich understanding of grace.

### **Spiritual Formation Needs Time and Vulnerability**

When the participants discussed their experience in a group of peers, and what contributed to their spiritual formation, the following themes surfaced: the formative influence of a place to be vulnerable, to be real, and to focus upon becoming over an extended period of time together.

### A Place to Be Vulnerable

When Rick spoke of the Missouri Summit group, he said, “There is an acceptance and even a kinship there that I sense. It seems there is a desire to be vulnerable.”

David said he was “hungry to be with those who know how to engage the complexities of life and relationship” and not offer a package solution. Instead he wanted to be among those who are asking, “Have you had an authentic encounter with one another?” Rick reflected on a difficult situation he had related earlier. Musing on it, he said,

I think that it would have been helpful to have people to fall back on, friends and peers to get advice from and that sort of thing. But even in moments that are not crisis moments, there is value in being able to share and feel known. Enjoying time and fellowship with other guys is just as important.

Sandy said that he appreciated the healthy mix of honesty and vulnerability. He described unhealthy group experiences in the past, where there were “no boundaries and no challenge whatsoever.” In other groups he experienced the opposite dynamic where people kept “everything close to the chest,” and did not open themselves up at all.

### A Place to be Real

Sandy described the level of trust in the group as,

Essential, complete, and thorough. I haven’t experienced that before and I have yet to fully experience it after. At the very first sit down, we had to see how it was handled and processed and essentially just built on each conversation after that. It just made me want to be even more vulnerable and more open. And that was big. That was absolutely, absolutely essential. Just a complete place of safety and confidence in each other, that was just huge. That was huge. And again, that set the tone for me in those early first couple days of conversations.

### A Place to Become

A theme of the peer relationships that David's story exemplified was that being in a group with a relational focus allows its members to "give people life with Jesus and make them more who they are meant to be." Several of the participants who had been in relationally-focused peer groups said that the experience was transformative for them, resulting in permanent change in the way they live and do the work of their ministry.

Mark explained, "As we had more and more gatherings, we were almost moving less and less out of a structured reality and into a more natural, relational type of reality." As the group met three more times over the next eighteen months he observed that,

We kind of began to build trust and community. Seeing that picture of what it looks like to have deep, rich, trusting relationships and tasting that made me realize that I have no intention or desire to minister for the next forty years of my life void of that.

Sandy echoed the value of his experience of "walking with four other very godly men who kind of took us under their wings and began to mentor us, especially in the area of grace and freedom and identity with Christ." He described being led,

[T]o walk in my identity in Christ, as opposed to just memorizing concepts and principles and doing daily devotional things. It was really a life altering, ninety-degree turn, so to speak, from my former path. Those two years have been the most instrumental as far as shaping me and how I pastor and how I act with people and how I journey with people.

He said this level of change does not happen at a weekend conference. "It's so important to take those next steps and not just depend on the one time experience to be your end all to end all," Sandy said.

### Together for an Extended Period

These participants connected the level of change they experienced to the fact that they had met together repeatedly over an extended time period in their group. As Sandy explained in his story,

If I had only had that initial week and then didn't have any continuing relationships or follow-ups out of that. . . . For me the relationships were solidly formed that week, but they really grew in what took place after that week. That was really instrumental.

Sandy and Mark were together in the group that met four times in 2010 and four times in 2011. As noted above, Mark said that meeting repeatedly built trust and community among the group members.

This study understands spiritual formation as the lengthy process of transformation and solidification of the spiritual life—the formation of the new creation within a believer by the Spirit of God. As noted in the review of literature, “Discipleship or spiritual formation cannot be suddenly acquired.”<sup>361</sup> The apostle Paul describes the process of spiritual formation in his letter to the Galatians as strenuous and laborious, like a woman’s labor when she delivers a child. Indeed, Paul calls the Galatians “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!”<sup>362</sup>

### **Peer Groups are Spiritually Formative**

Both Sandy and Mark looked back on their experience in their group as profoundly spiritually formative. Mark said,

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<sup>361</sup> Peterson, 12.

<sup>362</sup> Galatians 4:19.



I think the other thing that's been huge for me is the rich understanding of grace. Coming into the context of the Gathering was the first time I really felt I had a picture of a community walking in line with the gospel. We were truly reflecting and putting into practice the ramifications of the gospel of grace in how we interacted with each other, how we confronted each other, just all of those realities. For me, it gave me a picture and a glimpse of what I feel God has in mind for a body of believers living out of the gospel.

Brad allowed that it was still early in his ongoing peer group, but he said, "I am encouraged and hopeful for where it is going to go."

Mark said his experience in his peer group "had been huge" for his spiritual formation, "both opening my eyes to myself and bringing me to realize so many things that I was blinded to." Trust and safety were major factors in his experience as the next theme describes.

For Miguel, David, Mark, and Sandy, a consistent theme was that they found their relationships, and what they modeled, became the means of learning for them. They learned what they saw and experienced. Mark also said that the way these relationships operated together became "a model, an example for me to follow, too." Mark elaborated,

This desire to live this authentic life and pursue a healthy walk with Christ has always been our desire and part of our church plant. But we were never really, fully able to feel like we could live out of that until actually experiencing that with the Gathering. And experiencing that with our first gathering was confirmation that it is do-able. But I also began to realize that I can't live without this. It's not just cool. It's something I've got to have.

### Mentoring in Peer Relationships

Structured peer relationships among emerging pastors are voluntary associations of mutual encouragement, accountability and learning aimed at fostering spiritual growth and formation. Participants noted that mentoring did occur in their peer groups. The following

sections describe what they said the marks of mentoring were and the things that set the stage for it to occur.

The participants noted that the facilitators set the tone, especially setting a tone of trust. They said that gentle but bold authority was exercised, and that the setting or learning environment was conducive to learning. Ample unstructured relational time was a critical component, and participants recognized the need for support from the pastor's spouse.

### Cultivating a Sense of Trust

Sandy said most clearly how the facilitators set the tone. They "began to mentor us, especially in the area of grace and freedom and identity with Christ." Sandy said his encounters with "mentors and people who are willing to love you enough to be real with you even when it doesn't feel good" was something he hoped to emulate and pass on to his children.

Brad had only a short experience of being mentored in a peer group at the time of his interview, but he said what he sought in such a relationship was a person who could mentor him, "just in terms of life, parenting, you know, being a husband and a dad."

All participants stressed that trust in their structured peer relationships is indispensable for the experience to be spiritually transformative. Miguel went a step further, saying the willingness to receive and respond humbly to correction depends upon the level of trust. One pastor said of his peer group, "It gave me a new perspective. It provided people to look into my life and see things that I did not see."

David said that experiencing the way the leaders led in his group was a formative:

I couldn't have felt the impact of it in the same way if I hadn't actually experienced that moment. And also I think what is interesting about it, is that it is not something that you could have possibly reproduced.

Similarly, Sandy and Mark said that they had been impressed watching the interaction among their facilitators. Mark reflected,

For me it's opened up a whole world that God has kind of shown me through this. I've seen us working together and just watching each other apply the gospel to each other. That has been very freeing and exciting for me, just being able to participate and witness that.

### **The Setting of the Learning Environment**

Mark made a point of noting that the setting, both the meeting facilities and the beautiful natural grounds, situated away from the normal bustle of business, strongly shaped the tone of the meetings. He said,

I think that the setting was huge for me. It was a combination of both the beauty and the peace of nature for me personally. The majority of the meetings were in Colorado with the first one in Wintergreen, in the mountains of Virginia. For me personally, the mountains have always brought me to a point of being a little bit more at peace and just a little bit more contemplative, just wanting to reflect on the majesty of God. I remember David sharing that they wanted the delicious food and drink in essence to be a sacrament. But recognizing how hard it was for me to receive the lavishness of the food, the wine, and everything else, was a picture of my unwillingness to receive the lavishness of God's grace.

### **Bold Authority**

Another characteristic of the mentoring modeled within the structure of peer relationships is loving, bold, fatherly authority. As noted earlier, David saw this modeled

when one of the leaders in his group leaned forward and quietly, strongly, called James out for his childish posturing. It bears repeating here:

There was a spiritual authority. I had not experienced that kind of strength and that kind of engagement. It was some of the best pastoring I had ever seen. I had seen people do important pastoral things such as visit hospitals and know how to pray with sick people. And I had learned how to lead a business meeting and all sorts of skills. But if I hadn't actually been in the room when that happened, it's not something anyone could have described to me.

David said that although he has no interest in packaged mentoring programs, "I have lots of time for something that is really penetrating my heart and enlarging my vision of the kingdom of God in ways that are very alive."

#### Unstructured Relational Time

Mark and Sandy said that even the times when they were cooking together had a shaping effect. Mark agreed, saying, "For me, a lot informal conversations over cooking a meal or sitting on the porch and smoking a pipe were huge in shaping and mentoring me."

Sandy made a similar observation.

You know, it wasn't just sitting around a conference table so we could have formal conversations. It was preparing a meal together. It was going on a walk and climbing a mountain together. It was sitting on the back porch and smoking a pipe together or sipping wine. It was doing life together, and in that, discovering that we are equals.

#### Connection for Pastors' Spouses

Sandy's spouse knew he needed support from fellow pastors.

She was very eager for me to be a part of the Gathering. She knew when we first moved to an area where we didn't know anyone, and neither one of us had a friend, much less deep, close friends that you can carry the heavy weight of ministry

with . . . She saw the toll it was taking on me as far as not having someone to bear my soul and my struggles with. And as much as she wanted to help me with that, she knew that there was only so much that she could do.

Sandy said his spouse “got a taste of what we were experiencing on a regular, on-going journey for two years. She got to experience it twice. I think getting just a taste left her hungry for more.” Mark related that his wife expressed similar feelings.

One thing that was really good about having the couples Gathering was that as I was sharing in this rich community, my wife would share that she also struggled with feeling isolated. Because as much as I’ve been very alone being a church planter, she as the church planter’s wife has also been extremely alone. What I was describing and what I was getting to experience was something she herself was deeply hungry for.

The spiritual growth and mentoring outcomes of the structured peer relationships among the emerging pastoral leader participants were strong. Among the most outstanding results was the number of participants who said that they had never seen Christian community practiced as they had in their cohorts. Many related that this experience had profoundly affected the way they conduct their ministries, and had also positively impacted their marriages.

Sandy’s remark summarized this common theme well:

There is no greater thing than authentic friendships. And I tell people all the time, you’ll be blessed if you find four or five people in life that will love you enough to accept you as you are, but also not leave you where you are and be willing to walk with you.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research project was to discover how emerging pastoral leaders develop in spiritual formation through structured peer relationship and mentoring. This study described the need to find effective ways to foster learning and staying power among servant-leaders who are entering vocational ministry as emerging adults. The image of the hero leader, virtually invincible, always the man with the answer, the expert with the technical fix to every problem, and whose relationship with God is such that he no longer really wrestles with the world the flesh or the devil, is not only a myth, but, in this researchers opinion, an insidious lie. Parks says,

Few would deny that the heroic myth remains a dominant player in the commercial, social, and political psyche. Whether we are dealing with fame or blame, we continue to prize and promote the myth of the individual person as autonomous and in control in our assumptions about leadership.<sup>363</sup>

The participants' stories touched upon, but did not name the characteristics of a "hero leader." The hero leader avoids letting anyone in the church, possibly also anyone outside the church, see their "naked self." The hero model of leadership, as has been seen in the literature, is an unsustainable model.<sup>364</sup> The model perpetuates a system that is unsustainable in that it perpetuates a cycle of dependence upon one man's expertise and gifts. Such dependence on one leader holds great attraction to pastors because it makes them look wonderful. They get some reflected glory. In contrast, a sustainable model is

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<sup>363</sup> Parks, 204.

<sup>364</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 171. Burns and others.

created when emerging pastoral leaders become adept at enabling their church to face their most difficult challenges, and to adapt and to grow through the change that process enables.<sup>365</sup>

It is a conclusion of this study that many wise mentors and peer relationships are needed for mutual support in order to practice this model and help the church remain a vibrant witness and light in the world.

### **Moving from One-on-One Mentoring to Community**

There is a continuum historically and chronologically in mentoring relationships.<sup>366</sup> Mentoring as a discipline has matured over the last two decades. Parks and Saltiel note that the manner and content of mentoring is much broader and richer than merely a one-on-one, older, wiser mentor teaching the younger protégé needed professional skills and tricks of the trade.<sup>367</sup> I am persuaded that the same maturation of practices is needed among leaders in the church. The church is rich with men and women who have life and ministry experience; together they hold a massive bank account of wisdom.

Participants Sandy and Mark repeatedly expressed their experience of a close, vulnerable, collegial spirit in their cohorts. They found these relationships to be spiritually invigorating and transformative. They described group facilitators as “brotherly” and “accepting,” which helped to set a tone of trust. It is my belief that many mature pastoral leaders are need to be accessible in just that way, in order to pass their wisdom on to the rising generation of pastoral leaders. Those whose natural bent is to mentor their younger

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<sup>365</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 13-15.

<sup>366</sup> Saltiel, Sgroi, and Brockett, 9-10.

<sup>367</sup> Parks, 134.

peers in ministry can lead the way and encourage others to see its value as well. But to do this takes time. As Peterson noted, many pastors are far too busy.<sup>368</sup> I assert that many don't see the importance to the church of being a pastor-mentor. Pastors may not see it as an investment in the future of the church. Often they have an attitude that emerging pastoral leaders need to just learn and struggle through ministry alone as they did. They may feel that experience is the best teacher.<sup>369</sup> In the researcher's opinion, those pastors have forgotten how costly the tuition is in the school of experience. I wonder if there is jealousy and fear that a younger pastor might become an equal, or even outshine their more experienced peers?

I also wonder if church boards do not see mentoring as a huge investment of time that takes the pastor away from more important duties. But what could be more important than pouring the wisdom and experience a pastor has acquired over a lifetime into pastors who will serve the church in the coming decades? Every minister has a deposit of wisdom that, if given away generously, would greatly enrich the church. Many younger pastors welcome having older pastors pour into their lives and ministries. For example, study participants David and Brad both seek that wisdom continually, that they might emulate it in their lives as well as in their ministries.

According to Parks, Saltiel, Sgroi and Brockett, there is a natural movement from an unequal mentor-protégé relationship to a peer relationship.<sup>370</sup> This peership was evident

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<sup>368</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality*, Regent College Reprint. (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Bookstore, 1994), 237.

<sup>369</sup> Wind and Wood, 26.

<sup>370</sup> Saltiel, Sgroi, and Brockett.



between Paul and Luke.<sup>371</sup> As was noted, it is remarkable that this pattern is apparent even in Jesus' discipleship of the twelve apostles. Jesus has a deliberate and determined way of moving his disciples from the place of being pure spiritual and ministry novices, toward the moment in the upper room when he calls them friends. Jesus then prepares the apostles for the time when they will preach and shepherd in the power of the Spirit.<sup>372</sup>

### *Life-on-Life Learning*

We have observed that one of the wise things Jesus did in training and spiritually forming the disciples was to make use of virtually every life situation as a learning laboratory.<sup>373</sup> In my view, the church has too often narrowed the range and richness of learning environments by limiting learning to pulpit and pew, lectern and chair.<sup>374</sup> As Parks wrote and David, Sandy, and Mark observed, learning in small cohorts with able teachers, mentors, friends and facilitators was consistently viewed as among the most powerful, life-shaping, and transformative learning environments.<sup>375</sup> Learning occurred in community in an atmosphere of trust and vulnerability, where the distinction between the presumed

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<sup>371</sup> As noted in the literature review, this is reflected in the long months of companionship in travel and ministry between them.

<sup>372</sup> John 15:15-16 "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." Luke 24:48-49 "You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." John 20:21 "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

<sup>373</sup> Mark 4:11 "And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables" As noted in the biblical literature, Jesus walked and ate and lived day in and day out with his disciples, and in this context taught the disciples and the crowds.

<sup>374</sup> Austin Presbyterian Seminary; Michelle Collay, *Learning Circles: Creating Conditions for Professional Development* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1998); Heifetz and Linsky; Sharan B. Merriam, Rosemary S. Caffarella, and Lisa M. Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide, 3rd Edition* (Jossey-Bass, 2006); Parks; Saltiel, Sgroi, and Brockett; Keith J. Topping, "Trends in Peer Learning," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 25, no. 6, December (2005).

<sup>375</sup> Austin Presbyterian Seminary; Parks.

expert and the learner was not heightened by formalities. Instead, the distinction between teacher and student was de-emphasized; the leaders intentionally made their lives accessible in an effort to model transparency and bold love.

### *Places of Safety*

David, Sandy, Mark, Brad and Rick all observed that the learning and growth they experienced was related to the atmosphere of safety and trust in their cohorts. Oswald made a compelling case that being out of the pastoral role plays a major role in the ability to be reflective and to concentrate on “being.”<sup>376</sup>

Being in a transparent community of trust and integrity had to be modeled and seen before David, Mark or Sandy understood how it worked and how to practice it. They said they would never again conduct ministry without seeking to replicate that kind of community. They said that experience of gospel-saturated community gave them hope and models for what Christian community can and should be.

### *Learning in Community*

The biblical literature reveals that Paul’s practice was to engage in a lively, risky mix: a team of mature missionary leaders, younger missionary team members who were also learners, and a widely varied group of non-believers. As it turns out, this was a learning environment *par excellence*. It is worth the serious consideration of current pastoral leaders to consider finding ways to emulate Paul’s practice.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Oswald, 132.

<sup>377</sup> Acts 19:10-10.

Rick's testimony pointedly showed how processing conflict, suffering, and failure with an attentive, wise mentor was a major means of learning and spiritual growth for him. Sandy and Mark especially found an added dimension of depth and transformative power when they were transparent with trusted peers who called them on their sin, but also called them on to better things. They related that this peer structure was a model of gospel community for them. Both Sandy and Mark came into the Gathering out of anxiety and stress in their ministries, and found rest and renewal there.

This leads us to note another finding, which is easily overlooked. One of the most basic elements of the mentoring-peer relationship is the matter of presence, simply living and working alongside those who are further along in spiritual maturity and ministry experience. This principle of presence is clearly demonstrated in the biblical literature. The principle of presence was seen in the survey of the long, personal closeness and daily working relationship between Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the disciples, and Paul and his teams. Whether one-on-one or with a few, in each case the mentor was physically present with those who were learners.<sup>378</sup> But more important still is that the mentors are spiritually and emotionally present, attentive, and engaged. Peterson said such persons are attentive both to the person they are with, and also to the Spirit.<sup>379</sup>

The presence of trusted peer relationships when there is difficulty and conflict in ministry begs the question, "Would the difficult season have been the same and had the same outcomes if the pastor had walked through it with the encouragement, wisdom, emotional support, and prayer support of a group of trusted peers?"

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<sup>378</sup> Exodus 24:12; Numbers 11:28; Joshua 1:1; 1 Kings 19:21; Mark 3:14; Acts 16:11

<sup>379</sup> Peterson, 240.

As Rick experienced with a wise pastoral figure, having trusted support was a critical factor in his emotional health and successful navigation of challenges in the course of a ministry conflict. A fact that often remains hidden until there is failure of a pastor's health, marriage or moral life, is that there is often no one who pastors the pastor.<sup>380</sup> Pastors give of themselves to care for others, often tirelessly and to the neglect their own self-care. They walk with parishioners through the joys of birth, marriage, and grandchildren, and through the pain of conflicts and marriages that break up. While doing so they often endure gossip and backbiting from the very people they are trying to serve. They continue to walk through their parishioners' troubles, joys, illnesses, and death. They are there to be a wise guide and shepherd, a praying, loving, presence representing and embodying the love of Jesus. Most often they do not have anyone to pastor them, even though they experience all these same hurts and losses themselves, on top of the sometimes thoughtless, sometimes intentional wounds they receive from parishioners. Pastor's need to find a place where they can experience emotional processing and care; wise, loving churches need to ensure such places are available.

#### *Not a How-To Program*

According to Benner, Bonhoeffer, Hagberg, Nouwen, and Stanford (and despite Clinton's somewhat pragmatic view), spiritual formation happens within an intentional focus upon relationship, and application of the gospel at the heart level.<sup>381</sup> Spiritual

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<sup>380</sup> Oswald. As Oswald asserts, pastors rarely get out of role and in that place allow another to attend to their souls.

<sup>381</sup> David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Bonhoeffer; Clinton; Hagberg and Guelich; Chuck Miller, "Spiritual Formation of

formation is not something we “make happen,” it is the inner working of the Spirit of God. God uses relationships, conflict, suffering, the good, the bad, all in concert with the working of his Spirit, to teach, to provide insight, and ultimately to transform us.

The process of spiritual formation must be attended to with diligence, but God alone directs it. Space and time in the hours of the day and week must be opened up for this purpose. Time for relationships and community must be firmly fixed. And mutual encouragement, honesty, vulnerability, redemptive exhortation, and modeling need to be part of the rhythm of life.

This researcher is persuaded that our cultural penchant for pragmatic, how-to steps; results; and success as measured by numbers, noses, and nickels; all actually work powerfully against spiritual formation. The stories of pastors like Mark and David convince me that a safe place, godly mentors, and deep gospel community does keep pastors’ hearts alive. I am also persuaded by the work of Parks among emerging adults and Heifetz among practicing and aspiring professional and government leaders<sup>382</sup> that though some how-to steps may have value, they don’t seem to square well with how Jesus lived and taught. They were certainly not the major focus of Jesus’ teaching or ministry.

I am deeply persuaded that spiritual formation cannot be reduced to a programmatic, “how-to” program. Instead, what is needed is an intentional way of shaping programs with a high focus upon relational learning, understanding systems theory and adaptive challenges.<sup>383</sup> God seems to be ever at work to keep us looking to him and

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Leaders: Integrating Spirituality and Leadership Development," (n.p.: Xulon Press, 2007). Kindle edition; Nouwen; Nouwen, Christensen, and Laird.

<sup>382</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky; Heifetz and Linsky; Parks; Parks.

<sup>383</sup> Heifetz and Linsky; Herrington, Creech, and Taylor.

dependent upon him, and not our well-refined systems and steps.<sup>384</sup> Pastors and leaders are not the ones who direct the process; Jesus directs, but there is a role pastoral leaders play in the spiritual formation of others. That role is spiritual direction. Peterson and Hagberg observed the role of spiritual direction in the lives of believers in moving through the stages of their faith.<sup>385</sup> The stories of participants like David, Mark, Brad and Miguel suggest that spiritual direction is paying close attention to what God is doing in another's life—learning to listen for it, recognize it, and reflect it back to the other. It is often bold, strong, and even fierce in ways few believers seem to ever experience—and it comes near to the aroma of Jesus' incisive, tender, wounding, healing, loving actions.

The body of Christ can, and must, do better than it has done. The future of the church in these turbulent, changing times is at stake.

### Summary of Findings

The task before the church and her mature pastoral leaders is to find multiple means of fostering deep learning and staying power among those entering vocational ministry as emerging adults. There is work to be done in applying models of ministry such as Paul's wonderful matrix in Ephesus. The church must continue to seek the most effective leadership and mentoring styles that create and sustain them.

To employ a metaphor, the church's need to adapt is like the way the construction industry needed to adapt in the post-World War II housing boom. After WWII, the world changed. Homebuilding was under great pressure from the many baby boomers who were

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<sup>384</sup> Peterson; Peterson; Peterson; Miles J. Stanford, *The Complete Green Letters*, Clarion Classics (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1983).

<sup>385</sup> Hagberg and Guelich; Peterson.

looking for homes where they could raise their families. This dramatic increase in the demand for housing changed forever the way homes are built. There was a rapid and radical transformation in building methods, materials, and tools. Even the clothes a carpenter wore changed. Practices that had been sacrosanct for over a hundred years were quickly swept away.<sup>386</sup> Previously a contractor and his crew would build virtually every part of the house, from the foundation to the roof, from raw lumber. The demand was so high after the war, they could no longer afford to build one house at a time. They had to learn to build 500 houses at a time. Some carpenters became framing specialists, being paid just to frame a house, instead of by the hour. Carpenters custom made their own 22oz hammers with long handles that could drive a 16d<sup>387</sup> nail in one blow. Everything from the large open leather nail bags and wide suspenders to support them to the coiling metal rules that replaced folding wooden rulers. Plumbers, electricians, sheetmetal workers all changed their way of working. The biggest changes came not in tools and materials, but in the methods used to construct a house. The pressure that drove it all was that thousands of houses needed to be built; the industry had to respond, and fast.

I believe the pressure in the church today is suffering from the opposite problem, with membership and attendance decreasing, not increasing, from people leaving or never connecting. The last fifty years has borne witness to an astonishing pace and scope of change within church culture.<sup>388</sup> Keller observed that the church has become increasingly polarized between “the shrinking enclaves of traditional people” and the “increasing post-everything

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<sup>386</sup> Larry Haun, *A Carpenter's Life as Told by Houses* (Newtown, CT: Taunton Press, 2011).

<sup>387</sup> 16d is the construction industry designation for a sixteen-penny nail.

<sup>388</sup> Houston.

culture.”<sup>389</sup> As Keller argues persuasively, the majority of the church continues to conduct its ministry and use leadership paradigms that were forged in, and suited for, another era.<sup>390</sup> Our methods, structures, and tools require immediate updating to address the changes at hand.

The church has much to learn, from good work that is being done in other denominations, even where we have differences in theology. There is too much common grace, too much commonality in the image of God, to ignore what we can learn from one another. The church can learn much from existing models of the pastoral care and from self-care studies such as Oswald and the Alban Institute have provided.<sup>391</sup>

Theological education is vital and necessary. However, it is only the beginning of learning, and it is not well suited to engaging the practical challenges of navigating conflicts and the relational-political dynamics of ministry. Integration is needed between communities of experienced pastor-mentors and peers to maximize the educational benefit from experiential learning. Cohorts of peers utilizing wise facilitators are a powerful means of carrying out this learning process.

In my experience, those who most likely have the gifts to go solo in ministry tend to know that approach is deadly; those who think they have the requisite gift package but probably do not, often think they can and should do ministry alone. The idea that it is proper and biblical to do ministry solo, and the tendency to self-isolate, are a deadly

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<sup>389</sup> Keller.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Oswald. Dubois. Dubois said, “Imagine your congregation doing ministry not on what has happened before, or even on what people want” but instead upon “growing in its ability to understand and plan its ministry based on God’s call and on God’s desire for the world around you.”



combination. The constant pattern observed in the biblical literature is the practice of partnerships and teamwork.

We find another reality, established in the Pastors Summit findings, where the lay elder cannot fully understand or truly enter into the world of his pastor. Pastoral ministry is an altogether different species than any other vocation. Some believe that pastoral ministry lands among the most demanding vocations. Indeed, a unique combination of characteristics defines the challenge and difficulty of pastoring.

My conviction is that emerging leaders need to seek to connect with, push, cajole, and provoke experienced pastors to walk with them. Every pastor experiences high levels of challenge and difficulty. Some become wiser, grow spiritually, learn and become healthier through these challenges. Many do not. What makes the difference?

Study and experience have led me to conclude that pastors who participate in a cohort of trusted peers outside of their hierarchy, with whom they can confidentially process their learning, experience profound alleviation of the stress they endure. Rather than falling into cognitive disequilibrium, they receive the benefit from experiential learning and a collaborative learning process. Local churches and regional governing bodies need to encourage the formation and funding of such cohorts. Such cohorts provide pastors with a safe place to share, guiding them toward Christ and health through thoughtful response. Why not make that intentional? Why not build room into our systems for such vital connections? Why not identify gifted men, give them training, set them apart, and remunerate them for the hard work of caring for caregivers and forming life-giving learning environments in structured peer relationships?

In the research, we observe that professional skill alone is not enough to ensure that pastors endure in ministry, avoid crippling sin and cynicism, and live fully in the living waters of Christ. In order to see such results, they must develop the relational qualities of trust, honesty, and transparency, while cultivating personal presence. The research has persuaded me that pastors need a place where they can be present as their “naked selves” in order to receive what the Spirit of God seeks to impart of his presence and life. In that place of complete acceptance, where the grace of Jesus is deeply applied and savored, each man is also called to better things. It is a sacred community of friendship in which a fellowship of forgiven brothers existentially experience the love and presence of Christ. Study participants who walked in this way reported that their community became a foundation of God’s enabling grace to live fully as the men who Christ made them to be.

When we look back at the practices of the church during Nazi Germany, we clearly see the compromises and cultural captivity of the church. We correctly condemn and express disbelief that the church could be so blind and so far from faithfulness to the gospel that they gave their allegiance to Hitler’s evil Third Reich.<sup>392</sup> The question remains to be answered: will the next generation of believers look upon the church of the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century as the time when our blind spots in Christian praxis were faced humbly and with repentance? Or will we, too, be held captive to the cultural trends of our day?

It appears that a generational gap is widening. The younger generation is wary of the previous generation’s focus on programs, success measured by numbers, noses and nickels, and unsustainable paradigms of leadership. Many in the younger generation are hungry to return to authentic Christian community, genuine hospitality, and connection

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<sup>392</sup> Metaxas.

that delve beneath the surface. Peer learning enables that desired model of Christian community; it demonstrates, models, and embodies community in a way that is not merely theory.

### **Recommendations for Further Research and Practice**

The practice of Spiritual formation focuses upon the Christian's inner life, the heart,<sup>393</sup> from which flows the obedience of faith.<sup>394</sup> Spiritual formation may deepen through solitude, but it also requires forging in the fire of relationships. As pastors mature in Christ, a transformative process unfolds. This process requires time; it literally takes a lifetime. It is my belief that true leadership devotes itself to helping others mature in Christ. This is the leadership to which pastors are called. Even as they undergo the process of spiritual growth in their own lives, they must also lead and develop others in that same process. They are on a challenging path; and the challenge is great.

In times of warfare or crisis, command-driven leadership (hero leadership) may be completely appropriate. This type of leadership, where the leader tells everyone exactly what they must do and when, expecting unquestioning obedience, tempts the pastor who finds himself in the midst of great challenge. He may even misinterpret the experience of high challenge as "crisis," if he feels general lack of support. However, command or hero-leadership style is completely inappropriate in the work of leading the church, a social-

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<sup>393</sup> Matthew 15:18-20 "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."

<sup>394</sup> Romans 1:5

spiritual organization<sup>395</sup>, to change, learn, adapt, and grow. In order for the church to meet the challenges of the future, pastors and leaders throughout the church must learn and apply adaptive leadership, enabling congregations to honestly confront the brutal the facts<sup>396</sup> and navigate the complexities of living systems<sup>397</sup> rife with competing values and commitments.<sup>398</sup> To navigate these complexities with a greater rate of success requires support and structures in the forms of communities of practice and seasoned mentors.

The subject of mentoring has enjoyed resurgence in recent years. As the literature has shown,<sup>399</sup> one can take graduate level courses and attend workshops in order to learn how to be a mentor. However, becoming a mentor is like becoming a chef. Almost anyone can call herself a “chef” but within that vocation, it is a title that is only meaningful when other chefs recognize her gifts and skills. In the same way being a mentor is something that others recognize. Though many people call themselves mentors, life-transforming mentoring is rare. The practices of mentoring are in great need, and are best learned from skilled mentors.

As we have seen, structured peer relationships in communities of practice vitally contribute to transformative processes. When groups of peers gather to learn and be accountable to one another for their spiritual and vocational growth, they must exercise vulnerability and take relational risks. This presents a huge challenge to pastors used to

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<sup>395</sup> Van Gelder, 71-72.

<sup>396</sup> James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap—and Others Don't*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 65-89.

<sup>397</sup> Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 29-48.

<sup>398</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 30. “Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges peoples’ habits, beliefs, and values.”

<sup>399</sup> Austin Presbyterian Seminary; D. Michael Crow, "Multiplying Jesus Mentors: Designing a Reproducible Mentoring System: A Case Study," *Missiology* 36, no. 1 (2008); Garber; Robert Hicks and John McCracken, "Three Hats of a Leader: Coaching, Mentoring and Teaching," *Physician Executive* 36, no. 6 (2010); Miller; Parks; Ragins and Kram; Topping.

being the care-provider, or “hero.” Amidst such a demanding environment, adequate structure and support (reflective immersion) must be applied, or cognitive disequilibrium ensues. This is where burnout occurs in the pastorate. Pastors who hope to avoid burnout need a facilitator, well-versed in their experiences, to guide their process of reflective immersion. They need a pastor themselves, one who can offer care for them. One of the single greatest needs for continued research relates to how we might fund such care. What models exist, exemplifying how funding for structured peer groups and mentor-leaders for men in the pastorate might be provided?

While I believe this research has further application<sup>400</sup> than pastoral ministry, for this particular study, I have focused on the area of my own experience and expression of pastoral ministry. Through my experience, I have observed the denominational culture of the PCA in which we have a traditional form of greeting, “fathers and brethren.” What emerging leaders need, and are asking for, are fathers. New pastors, despite their education, are still novices in their field; it is humbling, but good and necessary for growth that they accept this truth. If a novice leader feels that their ministerial degree grants them a “leader” badge and that others will readily follow their lead, he or she is in for a rather rude and painful awakening.

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<sup>400</sup> Further research is also needed related to the findings of this study and their implications for other service vocations. These findings have cross-disciplinary application; they do not relate to the “sacred” world alone. Wherever practitioners operate in isolation, where support and structure are low, and where the strenuous challenge and continual flow of conflict and human brokenness exist, any solutions discovered or processes learned will supply great benefit across the board. Critical care providers (emergency room physicians, police, military, and educators, etc.), their experiences, and practices may not only benefit from but also inform this study and its findings.

Our practice in the areas of mentoring and structured peer relationships is currently occluded by an abundance of structures and programs that do not contribute to the mentoring and learning process. We must observe and analyze our existing structures to discover where room can be made for implementing the mentoring models that have been shown to be effective in our findings.

A spiritual movement among pastors is needed today. That movement will be the result of a new work of grace, transparency, humility, and joy in the gospel among many mature pastoral leaders. As its fruit, many of them take up the mantle of the true pastor-mentor. It will also mean that many attach themselves to one another in small circles of community among their peers, to provide strong support and true community, spurring one another on to love and good deeds, and learning from one another in the calling as ministers of the gospel. This movement will be characterized by an attitude change among many pastors who are at the pinnacle of their ministerial careers. The change will involve a determination to use the season of greatest convergence of one's gifts and experience to pour into the lives of emerging leaders; Jesus is the ultimate model of this ministry priority. A mentoring focus will result in wisdom and fruitfulness in the following generation, surpassing our own, and in our delight as we bear witness to such fruit. These intersecting outcomes are among the greatest needs in the church today.

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

The purpose of this research project was to discover how emerging pastoral leaders develop in spiritual formation by structured peer relationship mentoring.

1. Tell me about your current ministry context and how long you have served there.
2. What opportunities have you had to be mentored among peers (in a group setting) during your years as a pastor. Please describe the setting.
3. What was the nature of the peer relationships?
4. Please describe a critical incident in which you participated—either positive or negative—that was spiritually formative in the context of peer relationships.  
First, please give me the context of the situation.
5. What did you discover about these relationships?
6. What learning or spiritually formative aspects did you experience as a result?
7. How would you describe the nature of the relationships? How would you describe the level of trust and chemistry?
8. Describe the role of these relationships in your Christian maturity.
9. In what ways or situations did you feel your peer mentoring relationship was most helpful?
10. Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX B: TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Type of Group</u>	<u>Sponsor</u>	<u>Group Size</u>	<u>Facilitated</u>
Miguel	45	Baptist General Conference	Relational	Omega Initiative	3	Yes
David	40	Baptist General Conference	Relational	Omega Initiative	3	Yes
Sandy	38	Non-denominational	Relational	Omega Initiative	8	Team-led
Mark	30	Non-denominational	Relational	Omega Initiative	8	Team-led
Brad	45	PCA	Relational / Educational	SPE Cohort	5	Yes
Rick	40	PCA	Relational / Educational	SPE Cohort	5	Yes



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