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**Dynamics of Spiritual Renewal:  
How Richard Lovelace's Renewal Principles  
Have Influenced a Generation of Reformed Pastors**

By  
Jeremy Linneman

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Minis

Saint Louis, Missouri

2024

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how pastors in the Reformed tradition promote lifelong spiritual renewal among their congregants. Not many churches have a well-defined plan to promote their members' ongoing spiritual formation. Yet many pastors in the Reformed tradition have discovered a vision for spiritual formation and renewal in the writings of Gordon-Conwell theologian Richard Lovelace. Lovelace's *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (1979) has been credited by pastors including Tim Keller (Redeemer Presbyterian, New York City) as the most influential book in their philosophy of ministry and church strategy. However, Lovelace's work was generally theoretical and remains unknown to modern leaders. This study asks: How do pastors and leaders in the Reformed traditions, specifically between ages of 35-50, apply the renewal principles of Lovelace in the life of their churches? Further, how has Lovelace's vision for spiritual renewal been realized in these congregations?

This study will include a review of literature focused on three key areas to understand in promoting spiritual renewal in Reformed congregations: (1) Spiritual renewal according to Richard Lovelace, particularly in the areas of prayer, community, and mission; (2) the apostle Paul's theology of spiritual life, especially the gospel, spiritual life, regeneration, the Holy Spirit, resurrection, prayer, community, and mission; and (3) organizational and congregational culture, including how churches can promote their desired values, behaviors, and practices in congregational life.

This study utilizes a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with six pastors and leaders from various Reformed churches and ministries who are either familiar with Lovelace's theories or have been unknowingly shaped by them. The

methods of qualitative research are detailed, the process and strengths of qualitative research are discussed, and the researcher's position and the limitations of the study are acknowledged.

The interviews focus on gaining data with four research questions: (1) How do pastors in Reformed churches describe their theology of spiritual renewal? (2) How do they promote spiritual renewal among their congregants—in terms of prayer, community, and mission? (3) How do they integrate spiritual renewal into the culture of their congregation or organization? (4) In what ways and to what extent do their views of spiritual renewal compare to Lovelace's theories?

The study concludes with a final discussion of Lovelace's key insights and contributions, a summary of the findings, and recommendations for promoting spiritual renewal in churches in the future. The recommendations include needs for further research as well as opportunities for ministry practice and renewal.

For my boys, Joseph, Jude, and Jack:  
May you experience the depth of spiritual renewal envisioned here—and well beyond.

A number of problems which have troubled the church in this century are only solvable if we return to the vital core of biblical teaching dealing with Christian experience, just as the uneasy struggles in the late medieval church could only be resolved when Luther struck through to their spiritual root in his doctrine of justification.<sup>1</sup>

— Richard F. Lovelace

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<sup>1</sup> Richard F. Lovelace. *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 16.

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## **Acknowledgements**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The United States is currently experiencing the largest and fastest religious shift in its history. According to pastors and researchers Jim Davis and Michael Graham, about 40 million American adults have stopped going to church, with most of the change happening in the last twenty-five years.<sup>2</sup> This decrease in church attendance can be demonstrated across all theological traditions, age groups, ethnicities, political affiliations, education levels, geographic locations, and income brackets.<sup>3</sup> Studies show that more people have left American churches in the last twenty-five years than the number of people who joined churches in the First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening, and Billy Graham crusades combined.<sup>4</sup> As a result, for the first time in hundreds of years, more American adults do not attend church than attend church.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, for those who have remained in the church, their lives are increasingly deficient in the areas of spiritual renewal. The Pew Research Center has observed a significant decrease in congregants' engagement in prayer.<sup>6</sup> Community is

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<sup>2</sup> Jim Davis and Michael Graham, with Ryan P. Burge, *The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), xxii.

<sup>3</sup> Davis and Graham, *Dechurching*, xxiii.

<sup>4</sup> Davis and Graham, *Dechurching*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," Gallup, March 29, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> Travis Mitchell, "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), December 14, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>.

lacking, as the church largely reflects the country's epidemic of loneliness.<sup>7</sup> Decreased biblical illiteracy in the church demonstrates a failure of theological integration.<sup>8</sup> And the steady decline of church attendance suggests most Christians are not actively engaged in outreach to their community.<sup>9</sup>

Why are so many people leaving the church, and why are the lives of those that stay often deficient in their spiritual growth?

Scholars of Christian spirituality have suggested that few churches have a well-defined plan to promote their members' ongoing spiritual growth. Dallas Willard, a bestselling author on spiritual formation, once wrote, "I know of no current denomination or local congregation that has a concrete plan and practice for teaching people to do 'all things whatsoever I have commanded you.'"<sup>10</sup> While many Christian churches have well-developed doctrine and church polity, spiritual renewal has not been as popular a topic. While the Catholic tradition has a well-developed field of spiritual theology and the charismatic movement has provided increased attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in

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<sup>7</sup> Susan Mettes. *Why So Many of Us Feel Alone—and How Leaders Can Respond* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2023), 88-106.

<sup>8</sup> Bob Smietana, "What Do Americans Believe About God? New Study Explores Our Theology," September 28, 2016, <https://research.lifeway.com/2016/09/27/what-do-americans-believe-about-god-new-study-explores-our-theology/>, <https://research.lifeway.com/2016/09/27/what-do-americans-believe-about-god-new-study-explores-our-theology/>.

<sup>9</sup> Lindsey Witt-Swanson, Jennifer Benz, Daniel A. Cox, "Faith After the Pandemic: How COVID-19 Changed American Religion," *The Survey Center on American Life* (blog), accessed July 21, 2023, <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/faith-after-the-pandemic-how-covid-19-changed-american-religion/>.

<sup>10</sup> Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation in Christ: A Perspective on What It Is and How It Might Be Done," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 28, no. 4 (2000), 256.

Christian growth, the Protestant Reformed tradition has lacked a significant emphasis on spiritual renewal.<sup>11</sup>

When resources are available for a congregant's spiritual growth, they are often directed at the initial stage of Christian experience. Resources and organizations focused on discipling new converts are abundant. For example, the Alpha course has been successful in teaching doctrine and Christian living to new Christians.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the majority of focus is on a moment or short season of the congregant's lifespan. Few curriculum plans are intended to promote lifelong sanctification—that is, ongoing spiritual growth—over an individual's lifetime. And few methods used in curriculum towards Christian growth engage more than intellectual understanding, emotional reflection, or evangelistic activity.<sup>13</sup>

Further, a collection of stagnant individuals—those Christians not experiencing spiritual renewal—will gather into a stagnant congregation. Corporate spiritual renewal is at a minimum in the contemporary church.<sup>14</sup>

## **Recovering a Vision for Spiritual Renewal**

Many pastors in the Reformed tradition have discovered a vision for spiritual formation and renewal in the writings of 20th Century theologian Richard F. Lovelace.

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<sup>11</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> The Alpha Course is a series of sessions exploring the basics of the Christian faith. <https://alphausa.org/>

<sup>13</sup> For example, the Navigators organizations focuses on Bible memorization in discipleship (<https://navigators.org>), the Emotionally Healthy Discipleship ministry focuses on emotional health (<https://emotionallyhealthy.org>), and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association focuses on sharing the Christian faith (<https://billygraham.org>).

<sup>14</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 12.

Lovelace's *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, first published in 1979, has been credited by several pastors as the most influential book in their church strategy. New York City-based pastor and author Timothy Keller, considered by many to be the most influential Reformed pastor of past two decades, credited a significant portion of his intellectual formation and ministry to Lovelace. Editor in Chief of the Gospel Coalition, Collin Hansen, in his biography of Tim Keller, states that Lovelace's *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* shaped Keller's "views of the church and directed the course of his ministry" more than any other book beyond the Bible.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Keller recommended *Dynamics* and only one other book to all church planters and young ministers.<sup>16</sup>

Many other theologians and pastors also credit Lovelace's theories as foundational to their fruitful and influential ministries. Charles Colson, the founder of Prison Fellowship and a leading 20th Century evangelical figure, was personally tutored by Lovelace during his formative years.<sup>17</sup> Popular pastor and author Ray Ortlund Jr. wrote, "No one else clarified for me the convictions that can guide a church into a revival-ready condition."<sup>18</sup> Scott Sunquist, president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where Lovelace taught from 1969-1996, said Lovelace was the reason he first came as a student to the seminary. Sunquist explained, "I was on InterVarsity staff in Virginia and Dr. Lovelace spoke at our fall conference one year about the dynamics of

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<sup>15</sup> Collin Hansen, *Timothy Keller: His Spiritual and Intellectual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), 94.

<sup>16</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> "Remembering Richard F. Lovelace," Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/news/remembering-richard-f-lovelace/>.

<sup>18</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 1.

the spiritual life. I was overwhelmed... Then I read the book and the concepts are still with me today. Poetic, gracious, irenic, and quirky.”<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, most pastors in Lovelace’s own tradition, which includes multiple Reformed denominations and networks, are still unfamiliar with his work. Lovelace’s efforts to develop a holistic framework for Christian spirituality seems to have succeeded in some areas. But to what degree has it penetrated the theology and practice of Reformed churches several decades later? And how might its recovery inform a revival of spiritual theology, church life, and ministry practice in the Reformed church today?

### **A Comprehensive Plan for Spiritual Renewal**

“Spirituality is in many ways treated as the neglected stepchild of the Christian movement,” Lovelace wrote in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*.<sup>20</sup> While the Reformed tradition places significant emphasis on doctrine and leadership structure, Lovelace believed spirituality is no less substantial. Instead, he argued that spiritual theology is “the indispensable foundation which all of these are powerless and fall into decay.”<sup>21</sup>

Lovelace desired to establish a complete and balanced guide to help Christians grow and become healthier and more effective in their faith. Lovelace’s teachings and writings, then, were intended to operate on two levels: as “a general theory of individual and corporate spiritual health” and as a “plan for reformation and renewal in the Christian

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<sup>19</sup> “Remembering Richard F. Lovelace.”

<sup>20</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 12.



church.”<sup>22</sup> As a church historian by background and profession, Lovelace naturally drew upon the histories of Christian experience, especially from the Protestant Reformation to the contemporary period. His goal was to extrapolate principles of renewal and revival from the most positive eras of Christian experience—regardless of its denominational source or geographic location—for the sake of modern and future Christians and churches. This, then, would allow for a “unified field theory” of spiritual renewal.<sup>23</sup> What can provide the church new understanding and motivation to seek lifelong spiritual renewal? To engage the challenge, new research is needed on spiritual renewal according to Richard Lovelace, a Pauline theology of spiritual renewal, and the formation of a organizational culture that fosters spiritual renewal. The intersections of these three areas, combined with the best practices of pastors who have led fruitful spiritual renewal in their congregations, could inform the church about how to pursue renewal.

### **Purpose Statement**

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how pastors in the Reformed tradition promote spiritual renewal among their congregants.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do Reformed pastors describe their theology of spiritual renewal?
2. How do Reformed pastors promote spiritual renewal among their congregants?

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<sup>22</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 17.

- a. Through Prayer
  - b. Through Community
  - c. Through Mission
3. What spiritual renewal outcomes do Reformed pastors desire to see among their congregants?
  4. In what ways and to what extent do Reformed pastors' promotion of spiritual renewal compare to Lovelace's theories?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has significance for pastors in the Reformed tradition as well as other denominations and traditions. The findings are relevant for pastors and ministry leaders who seek to promote the spiritual renewal of their congregants. This study could also benefit theologians and those involved in Christian education, as well as the leaders of denominations and networks.

If ministers, local churches, and church movements can recover a biblical and theological framework for spiritual renewal, they may be able to promote their own spiritual revitalization amid a generation where the church is in decline. This study exists to understand how renewal is currently happening and how other pastors and churches can promote similar effects.

### **Definition of Terms**

Lovelace often used a set of terms that have been adopted by his students, and yet it is not always obvious what he originally meant. In this study, Lovelace's original

definitions and intent are used as much as possible. Some key terms are defined as follows:

Pneumodynamics – the Koine Greek term for “spiritual dynamics,” used frequently by Lovelace. Pneumodynamics are the multiple elements—preconditions, primary and secondary—that promote spiritual renewal in individuals and congregations. “Pneumodynamics” was the title of a course taught by Lovelace beginning in 1972 at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. From this course, Lovelace developed the books *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* and *Renewal as a Way of Life*.

Spiritual renewal – this is the ideal state of the spiritual experience; it is the normal Christian life. Renewal is the continuously available vibrancy of spiritual life in connection to Jesus Christ, incorporating an awareness of justification and sanctification, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and authority in spiritual conflict. Spiritual renewal has both personal and corporate expressions.

Corporate renewal – The ideal state of spiritual life for a community, whether a congregation or a group of congregations, as evidenced by a church’s effectiveness in community, mission, prayer, and theological integration.

Justification – a primary element in individual renewal, justification is “freedom from guilt because Jesus’ righteous acts and sacrificial death have been credited to our account. You are accepted—in Jesus.”<sup>24</sup>

Sanctification – a primary element in individual renewal, sanctification is “freedom from bondage to sin through the inpouring of the life of Christ in our

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life: A Guidebook for Spiritual Growth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 136.

experience, leading to progress in actual holiness. You are free from bondage to sin—in Jesus.”<sup>25</sup>

Holy Spirit’s filling – a primary element in individual renewal, the Holy Spirit within means “the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts so we have personal fellowship with God. You are not alone—in Jesus.”<sup>26</sup>

Authority in conflict – a primary element in individual renewal, authority in conflict is “authority over the powers of darkness, the ability to resist and displace demonic agents by calling upon them the judgment Jesus brought upon the devil. You are in command—in Jesus.”<sup>27</sup>

Mission – a secondary element of corporate renewal, mission is “following Jesus into the world, presenting his gospel in proclamation and in social demonstration.”<sup>28</sup>

Prayer – a secondary element of corporate renewal, prayer is “depending on the power of the risen Christ individually and corporately.”<sup>29</sup>

Community – a secondary element of corporate renewal, community is “uniting with the body of Christ in micro-communities and in macro-communities.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 136.

<sup>26</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 136.

<sup>27</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 136.

<sup>28</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 162.

<sup>29</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 162.

<sup>30</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 162.

Theological integration – a secondary element of corporate renewal, theological integration is “having the mind of Christ toward revealed truth and toward your culture.”<sup>31</sup>

Disenculturation – a secondary element of corporate renewal, disenculturation is the church’s process of untangling its core message and identity from its surrounding culture. Spiritual decline brings enculturation, as the church absorbs elements of its surrounding secular or religious cultures. The church’s message in spiritual renewal “must therefore be *disenculturated*, freed from its protective shell, so that it may take root in a thousand different cultural and political soils and bring them to full self-expression.”<sup>32</sup>

Spiritual Theology – “a discipline combining the history and the theology of Christian experience,” or “a study... in Christian spirituality.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 162.

<sup>32</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 186, emphasis original.

<sup>33</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 11.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors in the Reformed tradition promote spiritual renewal among their congregants.

The literature review begins with a study of Richard Lovelace's unique contribution to the fields of spiritual formation and theology. In particular, Lovelace's theories as applied to prayer, community, and mission are described most carefully. Next, the apostle Paul's teachings on the gospel, spiritual renewal, and the church will be considered. Lastly, a review of organizational culture theory will be presented to understand how leaders can influence their churches.

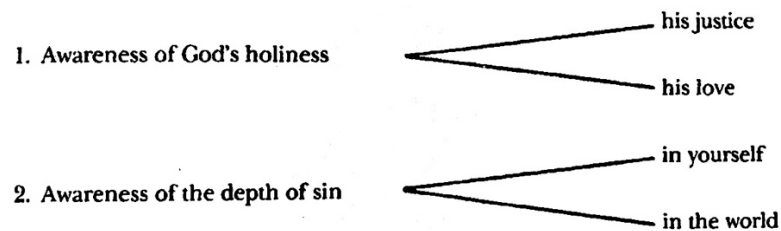
1. Spiritual renewal according to Richard Lovelace (*pneumodynamics*)
2. Pauline theology of spiritual renewal
3. Organizational culture

#### ***Pneumodynamics: Spiritual Renewal according to Richard Lovelace***

Spiritual renewal, according to Lovelace, begins with the renewal of an individuals' hearts and minds and then spread into their relationships, congregations, and broader communities. Lovelace writes:

*Spiritual* (as in spiritual life, spiritual gifts) usually means *deriving from the Holy Spirit*, which is its normal significance in Scripture. *Renewal*, *revival*, and *awakening* trace back to biblical metaphors for the infusion of spiritual life in Christian experience by the Holy Spirit. Usually they are used synonymously for broad-scale movements of the Holy Spirit's work in renewing spiritual vitality in the church and in fostering its expansion in mission and evangelism.<sup>34</sup>

Individual renewal has two preconditions: awareness of God’s holiness and awareness of depth of sin. This, Lovelace suggests, is the essence of Jewish spirituality, but including the knowledge of Jesus as Messianic King makes it distinctly Christian. The presence of these two preconditions enables an individual’s spiritual renewal. The product of this renewal is two-fold. First, the individual develops a God-centered life. “If God is the central reality of our lives, and if our main purpose in living is ‘to glorify God and enjoy him forever,’ then it is only realistic for us to live our lives increasingly with God at the center.”<sup>35</sup> Second, the individual develops a kingdom-centered life, which is the social aspect of the individual’s renewal. “The love for others is vital to a fully developed spiritual life... If loving ourselves and loving our neighbors as ourselves are really best understood as promoting the reign of God, then biblical spirituality is intimately connected with God’s kingdom.”<sup>36</sup> See Figure 1: Preconditions of Renewal.



**Figure 1: Preconditions of Renewal**

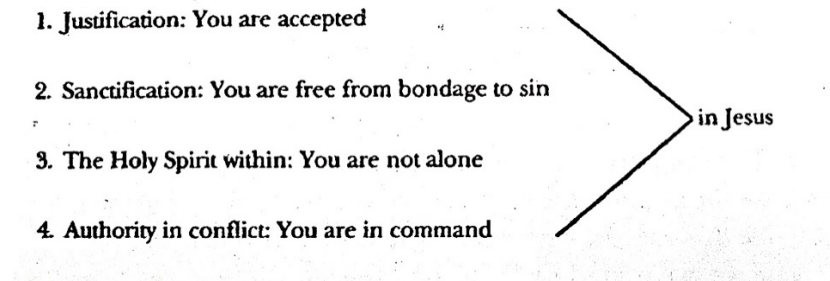
Further, an individual’s spiritual renewal has four primary elements in Lovelace’s theory. Embracing these four elements are necessary for ongoing renewal: justification,

<sup>34</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 21-22.

<sup>35</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 33. Quoting *Westminster Larger Catechism*, question one.

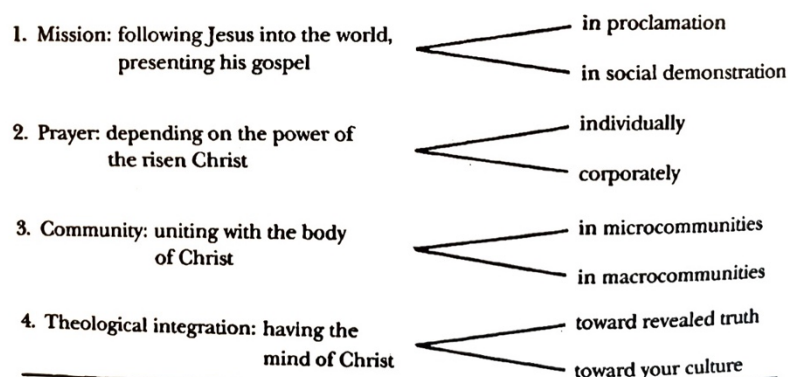
<sup>36</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 36, 40.

sanctification, the Holy Spirit's presence, and authority in spiritual conflict.<sup>37</sup> See Figure 2: Primary Elements of Renewal.



**Figure 2: Primary Elements of Renewal**

An individual's renewal, though, is "indissolubly connected to the renewal of the whole church."<sup>38</sup> Corporate renewal, according to Lovelace, involves five secondary dimensions: mission, prayer, community, theological integration, and disenculturation. It should be noted that Lovelace includes the first four secondary elements in both his books, yet disenculturation appears only in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. See Figure 3: Secondary Elements of Renewal, drawn from *Renewal as a Way of Life*, contains four of the original five secondary elements; disenculturation is not included.



**Figure 3: Secondary Elements of Renewal**

<sup>37</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 136.

<sup>38</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 10.



These three categories—preconditions, primary elements, and secondary elements—establish a framework for individual and corporate spiritual renewal to be understood.

### *Introducing Richard Lovelace*

“Studying with Lovelace was an unforgettable experience,” writes Collin Hanson.<sup>39</sup> While no single biography has studied Lovelace’s life and teachings, some descriptions of his personality and style exist. Richard Franz Lovelace was born in 1930 and grew up in New Mexico. He studied philosophy at Yale College. During his days at Yale, he was initially converted to Christianity from atheism through reading Thomas Merton’s *Seven Storey Mountain*.<sup>40</sup> Lovelace completed his MDiv at Westminster Theological Seminary, and finished his ThD at Princeton Theological Seminary, focusing his research on the Puritan revivalist Cotton Mather. Lovelace was ordained by Willow Grove Presbyterian Church in New Jersey. Lovelace joined the faculty of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, a non-denominational graduate school in the Reformed tradition, in 1969. Until 1996, he served as a professor of church history, specializing in Christian spirituality, the works of American theologian Jonathan Edwards, and the history of revivals.<sup>41</sup> Hansen wrote, “Tall and broad, with a close-trimmed beard, Lovelace typically wore a tweed jacket, sometimes with a vest. He carried a leather

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<sup>39</sup> Hansen, *Timothy Keller*, 94.

<sup>40</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> “Remembering Richard F. Lovelace.”

attaché case and used overhead projects as he taught large classes of students.”<sup>42</sup>

Lovelace died in 2020.

Gordon-Conwell maintains a memorial page to Lovelace’s memory, describing his personality and personal life.

On any given day during his years at Gordon-Conwell, one might have heard strains of Beethoven while walking in the hallway of faculty offices. The refrain would lead to the office of Dr. Lovelace where, flanked by piles of papers, he would be lost in the rapture of the Fifth Symphony. (He was a classical DJ for a year on Boston’s WBAQ.)<sup>43</sup>

Lovelace was married to Betty Lee Agar in 1958. Together, they had three children, David, Margaret (Peg), and Jonathan. He rode a motorcycle, collected snakes, and loved fishing, which he termed “the godly sport.”<sup>44</sup> On one occasion, Lovelace accidentally burned his family station wagon to the ground; his students’ final exams were lost in the fire. Lovelace’s son, David, wrote, “At home, he blared Mahler and Beethoven while banging away on his typewriter.”<sup>45</sup>

Although beloved by his students, many reported that Lovelace was a difficult teacher and unusual character. Hansen notes, “No one ever struggled to hear him, but students often struggled to follow him. Easily distracted, occasionally frustrating, and sometimes profound, Lovelace didn’t have much of a personal touch in his interactions with students. They wondered if he was ever fully present in the classroom.”<sup>46</sup> Despite

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<sup>42</sup> Hansen, *Timothy Keller*, 94.

<sup>43</sup> “Remembering Richard F. Lovelace.”

<sup>44</sup> “Remembering Richard F. Lovelace.”

<sup>45</sup> David Lovelace. “Remembering Richard Franz Lovelace,” accessed July 18, 2023, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Remembering-Richard-Franz-Lovelace.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Hansen, *Timothy Keller*, 94.

this, his two primary books have served as a foundation for an entire field of studies in spiritual renewal.

### *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*

In *Renewal as a Way of Life*, Lovelace demonstrates the dynamics of spiritual death (which he describes in the categories of sin, world, and devil) distort our relationships with God and others. But a continuous state of spiritual renewal will lead to restored relationships to God (prayer), those in the church (community), and those outside the faith (mission). These renewed relationships may seem on the surface to be the same practices any religious person might engage. But Lovelace shows that these can only be sustained personally and congregationally when they are products of renewal. These spiritual practices, properly understood, demonstrate rather than earn the approval of God.<sup>47</sup> For Lovelace, the secondary elements of renewal are “essential ways in which we must ‘abide in Christ’ if we are to be fully renewed by his Spirit.”<sup>48</sup>

Although Lovelace develops five secondary elements in *Dynamics* and four in *Renewal*, this study focuses on the three elements to which Lovelace gives the most attention in his own writing: prayer, community, and mission. Prayer will be discussed in terms of (1) individual and corporate prayer, (2) prayer in mission and spiritual warfare, and (3) growing in prayer. Mission will be discussed in terms of (1) renewal-driven mission, (2) disenculturation, and (3) revival. Next, a brief comparison between

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<sup>47</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 160.

<sup>48</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 161.

Lovelace's renewal dynamics and the modern "spiritual formation movement" will be explored. Finally, a summary of Lovelace's spiritual dynamics will be presented.

### **Secondary Elements of Renewal: Prayer**

According to Lovelace, spiritual renewal restores relationships, beginning with the believer's relationship God. This puts prayer in the center of the Christian's lifestyle and the church's activities: "We cannot stay close to him in fellowship without talking with him."<sup>49</sup> Prayer enables Christians to sense God's concerns for the world and to depend on him for their spiritual needs. "*Prayerful dependence on the risen Lord is essential to advancing his rule.*"<sup>50</sup>

#### *Individual and Corporate Prayer*

Lovelace describes two contexts for the church's prayer: individual and corporate. Lovelace believed individual and corporate prayer ought to be seamlessly connected in the believer's life. The absence of one context often suggests the other context is lacking as well. For instance, a lack of prayerfulness in a church program reflects both its leaders lack of private prayer and the church's overall diminishment of the role of prayer in its ministries.<sup>51</sup>

While most contemporary books and articles on prayer prioritize private prayer, Lovelace's writings uniquely focus on corporate prayer as well. Two of his theological

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<sup>49</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 161.

<sup>50</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 161, emphasis original.

<sup>51</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 153, 155.

followers, Jack Miller and Tim Keller, distinguish between “maintenance prayer” and “frontline prayer” (also sometimes called “extraordinary prayer”). Maintenance prayer meetings, according to Keller, are short, mechanical, and focused on internal needs.<sup>52</sup> Miller adds that in maintenance prayer, people ask for God’s help in various situations but lack expectancy that God will respond. “By contrast, people come to frontline prayer meetings to be changed.”<sup>53</sup> Miller writes that frontline prayer becomes an expression of kingdom power when the following conditions are met: faith/expectancy, oneness of purpose, authority, and commitment.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Keller writes that extraordinary prayer has three traits: “(1) a humble request to confess sins and humble ourselves, (2) a compassion and zeal for the flourishing of the church and the reaching of the lost, and (3) a yearning to know God, to see his face, to glimpse his glory.”<sup>55</sup>

### *Prayer in Mission and Spiritual Warfare*

Lovelace connected his first two secondary elements of renewal: mission and prayer. “Prayer is one of the main agencies through which we are brought to understand the mind of Christ toward our particular mission and the work of the kingdom in general.”<sup>56</sup> But he goes one step further in stating that prayer impacts human history directly. “The prayer of faith is the instrument which releases the mighty acts of the risen

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<sup>52</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 73.

<sup>53</sup> Jack Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986).

<sup>54</sup> Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*.

<sup>55</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 73.

<sup>56</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 156.

Christ in history.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, for Lovelace, prayer does not merely seek God’s wisdom, it also engages God’s power.

Prayer, then, becomes a key component in the Christian’s spiritual warfare. Lovelace frames three dynamics of spiritual death in *Renewal as a Way of Life*: the flesh, the world, and the devil. Each is developed with an entire chapter. This three-fold dynamic draws on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, warning them of “the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of air... and the cravings of our flesh” (Eph. 2:2-3).

In his chapter on the devil, as well as in his section on authority in spiritual conflict, Lovelace offers a thorough description of spiritual warfare. Lovelace emphasizes the need for prayer as a form of spiritual warfare more than his peers in Reformed theology. Lovelace wrote that prayer “is necessary because we are engaged in mission against immeasurably superior forces.”<sup>58</sup> Lovelace believed that one of the devil’s schemes was to “Quietly and undetectably... embitter the image of prayer in our minds until we will unconsciously go out of our way to avoid it.”<sup>59</sup> This emphasis on prayer and spiritual warfare can be first seen in the apostle Paul: “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4).

Lovelace appears to have influence among evangelical pastors and leaders in this area. Notably, the popular author John Mark Comer picks up Lovelace’s three-fold

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<sup>57</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 156.

<sup>58</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 146.

<sup>59</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 155.

system of spiritual death. The flesh, the world, and the devil form the three sections of his 2021 book, *Live No Lies*.<sup>60</sup>

### *Growing in Prayer*

Reformed theologian J. I. Packer once wrote, “I believe that prayer is the measure of a man, spiritually, in a way that nothing else, so that how we pray is as important a question as we can ever face.”<sup>61</sup> And yet, according to Reformed scholar D. A. Carson, “Most pastors testify to the decline in personal, family, and corporate prayers in much of the Western world.”<sup>62</sup> In 2024, researchers Ryan Skoog, Peter Greer, and Cameron Doolittle observed, “only 16 percent of pastors are very satisfied with their prayer lives... [and] 72 percent of pastors identify ‘consistency in personal prayer’ as one of the greatest needs they must address.”<sup>63</sup> This is problematic for the church as Tim Keller notes: “Prayerlessness is detrimental for a Christian, but it’s death for a Christian leader. Prayerlessness will kill you. It won’t just hurt you; it’ll kill you.”<sup>64</sup>

Where, then, can models of mature and faithful prayer be found? Lovelace looked beyond his own theological tradition. “Among Pentecostal and Charismatic circles,

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<sup>60</sup> John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies: Recognize and Resist the Three Enemies that Sabotage Your Peace* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2021).

<sup>61</sup> J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding our Way through Duty to Delight* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 56.

<sup>62</sup> D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), xiv.

<sup>63</sup> Ryan Skoog, Peter Greer, and Cameron Doolittle, *Lead with Prayer: The Spiritual Habits of World-Changing Leaders* (Brentwood, TN: Faith Words, 2024), xvi.

<sup>64</sup> Tim Keller, quoted in *Lead with Prayer*, xvii.

prayer has continued to hold the primary position it has always been given during spiritual awakenings.”<sup>65</sup>

Summarizing his views on prayer in relationship to renewal, Lovelace wrote, “if all regenerate church members in Western Christendom were to intercede daily simply for the most obvious spiritual concerns... the transformation which would result would be incalculable.”<sup>66</sup> Lovelace believed Christians and churches would not only have a transformed approach to ministry, but God would directly respond to each situation. He concluded, “Perhaps much of our prayer now should simply be for God to pour out such a spirit of prayer and supplication in the hearts of his people.”<sup>67</sup>

Paul Miller, the son of Jack Miller and author of the popular book, *A Praying Life*, was a second-generation disciple of Lovelace. Paul Miller’s emphasis on prayer in the local church fits with Lovelace’s renewal principles. In his book *A Praying Church*, Miller suggests that developing a culture of prayer in a church requires both a praying pastor and an entire community of people praying. Without a praying pastor, the church will fail to develop an entire culture of prayer. Without praying people though, a church may live vicariously off their praying pastor.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 158.

<sup>66</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 158.

<sup>67</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 160.

<sup>68</sup> Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Church, Becoming People of Hope in a Discouraging World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 123.



## Secondary Elements of Renewal: Community

In 2017, the U. S. surgeon general Vivek Murthy stated that loneliness was a leading source of health problems in the country. He writes that loneliness causes “an insidious type of stress” that leads to chronic inflammation and an increased risk to heart disease, arthritis, and diabetes.<sup>69</sup> His reflections include research that shows loneliness adversely affects physical health as much as smoking fifteen cigarettes per day.<sup>70</sup> Although social isolation has become commonplace in 21st Century America,<sup>71</sup> this trend is concerning because humans are inherently social beings.<sup>72</sup>

While Lovelace was writing before this research was available, he understood the importance of community in the Christian’s spiritual renewal. Lovelace notes that Western society is particularly individualistic compared to other cultures. Further, the Reformation emphasis on personal salvation and the Puritan accent on individual election form a further sense of individualism in the Western church.<sup>73</sup> Lovelace challenges the American church: “Neither the Bible nor the sacraments will leave the shelf or the

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<sup>69</sup> Vivek Murthy, “Work and the Loneliness Epidemic,” *Harvard Business Review*, September 26, 2017. Accessed October 15, 2024. <https://hbr.org/2017/09/work-and-the-loneliness-epidemic>.

<sup>70</sup> Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B. Smith, and J. Bradley Layton, “Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review,” 2010. *PLoS Med* 7(7): e1000316. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>.

<sup>71</sup> John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 2008), 8.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew D. Lieberman, *Social: Why Our Brains are Wired to Connect* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2013), 9.

<sup>73</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 176-77.

sanctuary to rescue a Christian who is too discouraged or backslidden to pray or worship. But a concerned brother or sister will do this again and again!”<sup>74</sup>

For Lovelace, the early church witness in Acts 2 and 4 demonstrate an ideal sort of Christian community. He sees a vital connection between community and mission in the early church. “Evidently there is something so spiritually healthy about this level of community that it is irresistibly attractive to outsiders—or as the text suggests, it provides a culture so nurturing that God can safely add new converts every day.”<sup>75</sup>

Lovelace primarily views community as an essential part of the congregation, but he also writes of its place in the fellowship and unity between churches, denominations, and traditions. To use Paul’s illustration in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, each local church is a body functioning together, but the global church, with all its differences, also exists as a single body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12, 21, 26; 14:26). Returning to his study of church history, Lovelace asserts, “in every movement of spiritual awakening since the Reformation, parts of the shattered Messianic body have drawn together and worked across party lines in mission and ministry.”<sup>76</sup>

For Lovelace, spiritual renewal is not merely an individual pursuit. It is a community project, and the fruit of renewal will always include the renewal of relationships, congregations, and societies.

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<sup>74</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 178.

<sup>75</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 179.

<sup>76</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 182.

## Secondary Elements of Renewal: Mission

A study by the Great Commission Research Network in 2024 highlights the top ten challenges facing the American church today. Drawing on surveys of hundreds of pastors, the number one challenge facing pastors is “effectively evangelizing people who have never visited the church” (3.30 out of a possible 4) and the second most significant challenge is “mobilizing for evangelism” (3.27).<sup>77</sup> Additional concerns related to evangelism and mission include “getting members to put faith into practice (2.98), mobilizing members for ministry (2.94), and reaching out to the community to develop new relationships (2.89).”<sup>78</sup> Taken together, mission concerns easily rank as the largest “cluster of challenges” facing the church today.

Richard Lovelace understood the challenge of mission and evangelism in his own generation and devoted large sections of *Dynamics* and *Renewal* to their practice. According to Lovelace, the congregation experiencing personal renewal will not only be restored in relationship to God and others in the church; they will also be restored to those outside the faith. “*We cannot really stay close to him without following in this outward movement of mission.*”<sup>79</sup> For Lovelace, this restoration includes both the church’s missionary activity and its process of disenculturation.

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<sup>77</sup> Edward E. Moody, Jr. “Top 10 Challenges Facing Pastors in 2024.” *Great Commission Research Journal*. Vol. 1, Issue 1, Spring 2024, 22.

<sup>78</sup> Moody, “Top 10 Challenges Facing Pastors in 2023,” 22-23.

<sup>79</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 160, emphasis original.

### *Renewal-driven Mission*

Lovelace's followers have developed the term "renewal-driven mission" to describe his unique emphasis on the compatibility of inward renewal and outward mission. For example, the Harbor Network, a church planting fellowship based in Louisville, Kentucky, lists renewal-driven mission among its five core values. They write, "We join with the Holy Spirit and one another in the work of personal, social, and cultural renewal."<sup>80</sup>

Jack Miller draws on Lovelace's principles spiritual renewal throughout his book, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*. On renewal and mission, Miller describes the marks of a healthy, growing, mission-oriented church: (1) it is welcoming of outsiders, (2) it is a praying church, (3) its pastor serves as the pacesetter, (4) its preaching is marked by humble passion, and (5) it equips members for mission work.<sup>81</sup> Miller's marks of a healthy church share much in common with Lovelace's secondary dynamics of renewal, especially in the categories of prayer and mission.

### *Disenculturation*

Lovelace's *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* includes five secondary elements of renewal: mission, community, prayer, theological integration, and disenculturation. The final element, disenculturation, is curiously not included in his later *Renewal as a Way of Life* and yet is seminal to Lovelace's theology of mission in *Dynamics*. The element of

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<sup>80</sup> Harbor Network, "Our Core Values." Accessed September 19, 2024.  
<https://www.harbornetwork.com/about>.

<sup>81</sup> Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*.

disenculturation can be understood, Lovelace suggests, as a process of enculturation (either “destructive” or “protective”), disenculturation, and renewed enculturation.

“One of the first effects of spiritual decline among the people of God,” Lovelace writes, is “*enculturation*, saturation with the godless culture of the surrounding world.”<sup>82</sup> When spiritual renewal is not the ongoing state of the church, its members absorb the elements of the surrounding culture, whether secular or religious elements. “When men’s hearts are not full of God, they become full of the world.”<sup>83</sup> Enculturation can take two forms, according to Lovelace: “destructive” and “protective.”

Destructive enculturation occurs when the church takes on the mind and habits of a secular culture. Even in the early church, believers failed to fully apply the implications of their core message and identity in the midst of a pagan world. The Corinthian church serves as a New Testament example of destructive enculturation, as they allowed sexual immorality, pagan practices related to food, and spiritual fanaticism to persist. For a historical example, the early church father Tertullian observed destructive enculturation among his congregants and sought to restrict their activities.<sup>84</sup> In a contemporary context, destructive enculturation could look like a Christian adopting a secular view toward something the Bible explicitly rejects, such as homosexuality, abortion, or illegal drug use.

Protective enculturation occurs when the church fails to disentangle its primary identity and message from a religious environment. The Galatian church serves as a New

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<sup>82</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 184.

<sup>83</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 184.

<sup>84</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 191.

Testament example of protective enculturation, as they allowed Hebrew regulations to remain in place and then excluded non-Jewish Christians from their meals and holidays. Returning to the previous historical example, Tertullian's response to destructive enculturation was to instead form a protective culture around his congregations, requiring them to abstain from theater, dance, and use of cosmetics. Later, church traditions sought to further protect its members by banning certain clothing styles, playing cards, cultural holidays, alcohol, tobacco, and the use of musical instruments in worship. "By the 1930s," Lovelace writes, "the average American Fundamentalist... [had] a way of confusing America, the Republican Party and the capitalist system with the kingdom of God."<sup>85</sup>

Contemporary ministers have applied Lovelace's theories to the contemporary American political culture. Tim Keller described the Christian gospel as being distinct from both the world and religion. He uses "world" as shorthand for Lovelace's destructive enculturation, where believers adopt principles of secular culture without applying the gospel message to them. Keller then uses "religion" as shorthand for Lovelace's protective enculturation, where believers find their security in spiritual achievement and obedience to moral codes.<sup>86</sup>

Whether the church has become enculturated toward secular (destructive) or religious (protective) directions, its task is always to recover the centrality of its identity and message through disenculturation. One could summarize the contemporary American

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<sup>85</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 195.

<sup>86</sup> Timothy Keller, foreword to *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 9.

church's enculturation as along the lines of either progressive or conservative lines. The church that has become comfortable with destructive enculturation will likely bind itself to progressive theology and the politics of the Left. The church that has sought to remain within a protective layer will likely bind itself to fundamentalist theology and the politics of the Right. While their expressions are different and have led to much division in the modern church, Lovelace suggests that both errors stem from the fact that "the church has not fully appropriated the life and redemptive benefits of Jesus Christ."<sup>87</sup> Whether coming from the Left or the Right, the enculturated church must return to its distinct identity by embracing its core message and the primary and secondary elements of renewal.

Lovelace summarizes disenculturation as "being freed from cultural binds."<sup>88</sup> He continues, "disenculturation is possible only when we rely fully on Christ for justification and sanctification; it is necessary if we are to be released from the marriage of religion and culture which prevents our reaching all nations and reflecting the diversity of life in Christ."<sup>89</sup> Because of the human tendency to tie Christian identity and teaching to earthly cultural and political organization, its message must frequently be disentangled from the world. Only when it is disenculturated, freed from its destructive connections or its protective shell, can the message "take root in a thousand different cultural and political soils and bring them to full self-expression."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 191.

<sup>88</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 75.

<sup>89</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 146.

<sup>90</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 186.

Disenculturation is necessary for the church's missionary expansion. The earliest years of the Christian movement supports this theory. "If the apostolic church had failed to take the steps described in Acts 10-15," Lovelace writes, "its spread among the nations would have stopped dead, and the power of God would have been withheld from its inner life."<sup>91</sup>

Keller quotes Lovelace's *Dynamics* in encouraging Christians toward humility in cross-cultural relationships. Those not experiencing spiritual renewal "not only cling to the shreds of ability and righteousness they find in themselves, but they fix upon their race, their membership in a party, their familiar social and ecclesiastical patterns, and their culture as a means of self-recommendation."<sup>92</sup>

### *Revival*

"Richard Lovelace," as Tim Keller notes, "was a student of the history of revivals. He sought to discover what, for all their apparent differences, they had in common."<sup>93</sup> Lovelace may have been "the eminent American church historian," to quote contemporary Baptist theologians David Dockery and Malcolm Yarnell.<sup>94</sup> His status was an expert on the Princeton theologians of the 19th and 20th Centuries.<sup>95</sup> In each of these

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<sup>91</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 199.

<sup>92</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 77-78, quoting Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, First Edition (1979), 198-99.

<sup>93</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 54.

<sup>94</sup> David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Special Revelation and Scripture* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2024), 226.

<sup>95</sup> Dockery and Yarnell, *Special Revelation and Scripture*, 226. The authors are referencing Lovelace's essay, "Inerrancy: Some Historical Perspectives," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 15-48.



roles, Lovelace sought to write widely on the controversial place of revival in Christian history.

It is important as well to understand what Lovelace does not mean by the term revival. Lovelace does not have in mind a scheduled evangelistic gathering, such as the revivals common in the Southern Baptist tradition. He also is not referring merely to an emotional experience that can be conjured or sustained.

“Renewal, revival and awakening,” Lovelace writes in the introduction to *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, “trace back to biblical metaphors for the infusion of spiritual life in Christian experience by the Holy Spirit. Usually they are used synonymously for broad-scale movements of the Holy Spirit’s work in renewing spiritual vitality.”<sup>96</sup>

Keller may be credited with popularizing Lovelace’s theory of revival in the 21st Century. Keller quotes liberally from Lovelace in his chapters on “gospel renewal” in *Center Church*, and he lists Lovelace’s *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* among his intermediate level reading recommendations on renewal and revival.<sup>97</sup> Drawing on Lovelace, he summarizes true revival as such.

Revivals are seasons in which the ordinary operations of the Holy Spirit are intensified many-fold. In revival, the ordinary means of grace produce a great wave of. newly awakened inquirers, soundly converted sinners, and spiritually renewed believers. Revival is not a historical curiosity; it is a consistent pattern of how the Holy Spirit works in a community to arrest and counteract the default mode of the human heart. It is surely relevant to ministry in twenty-first century global cultures, as it is relevant in every culture.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 21.

<sup>97</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 77-78.

<sup>98</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 55.

In this way, Lovelace and Keller encourage Christians to seek revival through practicing the primary and secondary elements of renewal—especially in the areas of prayer, community, and mission described above.

Australian cultural commentator Mark Sayers, in his 2019 book *Reappearing Church*, draws on Lovelace’s distinction between renewal and revival. He writes that renewal is “the refreshment, release, and advancement that individuals, groups, churches, and cultures experience when they are realigned with God’s presence.”<sup>99</sup> Revival, for Sayers, is “when renewal occurs on a large scale, bringing significant advancement, growth, and kingdom fruit to a city, people group, movement, region, or nations. Revival is renewal gone viral.”<sup>100</sup> Like Lovelace, Sayers writes that personal renewal and corporate renewal are indissolubly intertwined, with personal renewal always preceding corporate renewal and revival.<sup>101</sup> For Sayers, renewal can be described as a process with five steps: (1) holy discontent, (2) preparation, (3) contending in prayer, (4) embracing holy patterns, and (5) living as a remnant.<sup>102</sup> His description of contending prayer fits Lovelace’s emphasis on extraordinary or frontline prayer. Sayers adds, “This kind of prayer is almost always persistent, as God uses the passage of time to shape us, realigning us to His timeline, teaching His people the value of persistence, a vital element of those He wishes to use in renewal.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Mark Sayers, *Reappearing Church: The Hope for Renewal in the Rise of Our Post-Christian Culture* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), 33.

<sup>100</sup> Sayers, *Reappearing Church*, 33.

<sup>101</sup> Sayers, *Reappearing Church*, 37.

<sup>102</sup> Sayers, *Reappearing Church*, 42.

<sup>103</sup> Sayers, *Reappearing Church*, 42.

## *Spiritual Renewal and Spiritual Formation*

In the past forty years, in the same timeframe in which Lovelace's theories of spiritual renewal have been published and discussed, spiritual formation has emerged as a new trend in Christian theology and practice. Spiritual formation is the study of how Christians grow spiritually; it is closely related to the Reformed tradition's discussion of sanctification, as both areas focus on a Christian's conformity to Jesus.

Trevin Wax, writing for The Gospel Coalition, describes three major influences in the evangelical tradition today—spirit filled worship, seeker sensitive church growth, and gospel centrality. He then suggests that “a fourth wave” is on the way, “a renewed emphasis on spiritual formation.”<sup>104</sup> Wax believes this spiritual formation movement will continue to grow as the 21st Century continues. But what do this new spiritual formation movement and Richard Lovelace have in common?

Chris Armstrong, a former church historian at Wheaton College, believes that Richard Lovelace's 1973 essay, “The Sanctification Gap,” first described the need for a new emphasis on a renewed spiritual life that helped trigger the spiritual formation movement.<sup>105</sup> While spiritual formation has been a field of study for centuries, its popularity was sparked in the 1970's through 1990's by the writings of Richard Foster and Dallas Willard. The Quaker pastor and spiritual writer Richard Foster's book

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<sup>104</sup> Trevin Wax, “3 Waves That Have Shaped Evangelical Churches (and a 4th on the Way),” The Gospel Coalition, June 4, 2024. Accessed September 20, 2024. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/waves-shaped-evangelical-churches/>.

<sup>105</sup> Chris Armstrong, “A Conversation with Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson, and James Houston on the ‘resourcement’ movement in evangelical spirituality” (blog). Accessed September 20, 2024. <https://gratefultothedeath.com/2010/06/06/a-conversation-with-dallas-willard-richard-foster-eugene-peterson-and-james-houston-on-the-ressourcement-movement-in-evaneglical-spirituality/#more-1160>.

*Celebration of Discipline*,<sup>106</sup> published in 1978, was highly popular and to date has sold over one million copies.<sup>107</sup> It was featured in Christianity Today's top ten books of the 20th Century.<sup>108</sup> While Foster's book is focused on spiritual disciplines, its vision for a deeper spiritual life is largely similar to Lovelace's, and nothing in either author's work directly contradicts the other's. Foster's book, *Prayer*, bears a similar view of prayer in the role of spiritual formation as Lovelace's primary dynamic of prayer.<sup>109</sup> Foster's book, *Streams of Living Water*, presents Lovelace's emphasis on sanctification through Bible reading and application in the chapter, "The Evangelical Tradition: Discovering the Word-Centered Life."<sup>110</sup>

One of Foster's close friends in ministry was Dallas Willard, who taught in the philosophy department at the University of Southern California. The two met while in the same small church in California, and later, Foster wrote the introduction to Willard's authorized biography.<sup>111</sup> Willard is most well-known for his books *The Divine*

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<sup>106</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Revised 1st Edition (San Francisco: CA, Harper & Row, 1988).

<sup>107</sup> Wikipedia, "Richard Foster (theologian)." Accessed September 20, 2024. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Foster\\_\(theologian\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Foster_(theologian)).

<sup>108</sup> Christianity Today, "Books of the Century," April 24, 2000. Accessed September 20, 2024. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2000/04/books-of-century/>.

<sup>109</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: The Heart's True Home*, 10th Anniversary Edition (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2002).

<sup>110</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Christian Faith*, Revised Edition (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2001), 185-234.

<sup>111</sup> Gary Moon, *Becoming Dallas Willard: The Formation of a Philosopher, Teacher, and Christ Follower* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018).

*Conspiracy*<sup>112</sup> and *Renovation of the Heart*.<sup>113</sup> While Willard rarely quotes Lovelace directly, a comparison of their themes shows significant similarities in theme and language.<sup>114</sup> Lovelace's first pre-condition for renewal, an awareness of God's holiness, is described by Stephen Porter as a major feature in Willard's theology in an essay for the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Care*.<sup>115</sup> Lovelace's primary dynamic of renewal, the indwelling Holy Spirit, also features in Willard's first book, *Hearing God*,<sup>116</sup> and Lovelace's dynamic of prayer features in Willard's second book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.<sup>117</sup> Theologian Bill Hull has also written on Willard's theology of mission, which fits with Lovelace's secondary dynamic of mission as well.<sup>118</sup>

Despite its continued growth, the spiritual formation movement has received recent criticism. Kyle Strobel, professor of spiritual formation at Biola University, fears that the movement, specifically citing author John Mark Comer, has not sufficiently articulated the theology beneath spiritual formation. He continues: "In that unspecified

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<sup>112</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Recovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1998).

<sup>113</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Colorado Springs, CO: Nav Press, 2021).

<sup>114</sup> For a thorough comparison of Dallas Willard and Richard Lovelace, see the essay by an unnamed author, "Examining Richard Lovelace's Model of Continuous Renewal in Dallas Willard's Corpus on Spiritual Transformation." Accessed September 20, 2024. <http://tcsharing.blogspot.com/2015/10/examining-richard-lovelaces-model-of.html>.

<sup>115</sup> Steve L. Porter, "THE WILLARDIAN CORPUS." *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 3, no. 2 (2010): 240.

<sup>116</sup> Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*.

<sup>117</sup> Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, Reprint Edition (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1999).

<sup>118</sup> Bill Hull, "A Reluctant Prophet: How Does Professor Willard Propose to Take Over the World." *Journal Of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 3, no. 2 (2010): 283–95.

space, folks often insert fleshly and moralistic means of growth, replacing a distinctively Christian vision of spiritual formation by its worldly counterpart. This is why we need a spiritual *theology* that does more than protect us from what we're afraid of, but that casts a robust vision for life with God in this present evil age."<sup>119</sup> In short, what Strobel is arguing for is the exact aim of Lovelace's project forty-five years earlier, a spiritual theology that serves as a unified field theory for Christian growth and renewal.

Although Richard Lovelace did not receive the national recognition that Richard Foster and Dallas Willard received, his theories of spiritual renewal form a comprehensive theological framework for the spiritual formation movement that Foster and Willard led, and which remains alive and well today.

### *Summary of Lovelace's Dynamics*

In summary, Lovelace develops a unified theory of spiritual renewal that integrates primary dynamics (justification, sanctification, and the Holy Spirit) and secondary elements (worship, prayer, community, and mission). Lovelace's theories have been widely influential among Reformed and evangelical pastors, including Tim Keller, Jack Miller, John Mark Comer, and Mark Sayers.

## **Pauline Theology of Spiritual Renewal**

In the previous section, Richard Lovelace's unique approach to spiritual renewal was reviewed and compared to modern theories. With this evaluation in mind, the apostle

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<sup>119</sup> Kyle Stobel, "The New (But Old) Wave in Evangelicalism," Talbot School of Theology Faculty Blog, June 6, 2024. Accessed October 14, 2024. <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2024/the-new-but-old-wave-in-evangelicalism>.

Paul's writings on spiritual renewal will now be considered. While a comprehensive review of Pauline theology is outside the scope of this project, Paul's key teachings and writings on spiritual life, renewal, and sanctification will be presented here.

### *Introducing the Apostle Paul*

Why must a study on the dynamics of spiritual renewal review the writings of a single 1st Century author? Arguably no philosopher, theologian, or popular writer has had the literary influence of the apostle Paul in the last two thousand years. Thirteen of the twenty-seven New Testament books are commonly attributed to Paul, and he features prominently in the Book of Acts. His peers understood him to be a uniquely gifted author of Scripture even in his lifetime (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Further, he is responsible for three major missionary journeys and the establishment of churches across Europe and Central Asia.

N. T. Wright, one of the world's leading biblical scholars, observes that although Paul's writings consist of roughly eighty pages in a modern text, "It is a safe bet to say that these letters, page for page, have generated more comment, more sermons and seminars, more monographs and dissertations than any other writings from the ancient world."<sup>120</sup> Wright compares Paul's influence on the world to be equivalent to an obscure artist producing less than a dozen paintings in his lifetime but becoming more studied and valued "than all the Rembrandts and all the Monets and Van Goghs in the world."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2018), 1.

<sup>121</sup> Wright, *Paul*, 1.

Guy Waters, in his book *The Life and Theology of Paul*, agrees. He writes, “It is hard to overstate the influence of the Apostle Paul... One cannot think of Paul without a sense of admiration and wonder at the ways in which the Lord Jesus Christ has used him in the lives of people. He is one of the greatest minds ever to have graced the Christian church.”<sup>122</sup> Waters notes that Paul’s writings served as the basis for the conversions of three of the most influential Christian figures of the last two millennia: Saint Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, and John Wesley.<sup>123</sup>

### *The Gospel*

The gospel, the announcement of good news about Jesus Christ and his life, death, and resurrection, stands as the starting point of Paul’s theology of spiritual renewal. For Paul, the gospel is the means of salvation and “of first importance” for the Christian life (1 Cor. 15:1-3). In several letters, Paul gives summarized descriptions of the gospel message. To the Corinthians, he writes that the essential message is “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). But for Paul, the gospel is not merely a message; “it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). The gospel, in Paul’s writings, includes the love and mercy of God (Eph. 2:4), new life (Eph. 2:5), “rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:4), justification by faith (Rom. 5:1, Tit. 3:7), substitutionary atonement (Rom. 8:3), the gift of eternal life (Tit.

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<sup>122</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Life and Theology of Paul* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2018), 3.

<sup>123</sup> Waters, *The Life and Theology of Paul*, 1.



3:7), victory over sin, flesh, and the devil (Col. 2:13-15), the formation of a new covenant (2 Cor. 3:13-18), and comes entirely by grace (Eph. 2:7-9).

Michael Reeves, president of Union School of Theology in the U. K., summarizes Paul's teachings on the gospel. "For Paul, the gospel is: 1. Trinitarian: it is the good news of the Father concerning his Son, who was declared the Son of God in power according to the Spirit. 2. Biblical: it is proclaimed through the holy Scriptures. 3. Christ-centered: it concerns God's Son. 4. Spirit-effected: it is by the Spirit that the Son is revealed."<sup>124</sup> This multi-faceted gospel is key to understanding Paul's theology of spirituality.

### *Regeneration*

Paul's teachings on the gospel highlight the doctrine of regeneration, the theological term for a person's new birth and new life in Christ. It is nearly synonymous with conversion but highlights God's initiative in changing an individual's life. Regeneration features prominently in Paul's theology of spiritual life and renewal. Christians are "made alive with Christ" (Eph. 2:5) through Christ. They experience "rebirth" (Tit. 3:5). Reeves notes, "For Paul, true regeneration cannot be engineered by us: it is a divine work, brought about only through the gospel, which is 'the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes' (Rom. 1:16)."<sup>125</sup> Thus, regeneration is a key doctrine for Paul to make a vital connection between the gospel and our spiritual life.

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<sup>124</sup> Michael Reeves, *Gospel People: A Call for Evangelical Integrity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 16.

<sup>125</sup> Reeves, *Gospel People*, 75.

## *Spiritual Life*

Paul's emphasis on regeneration forms a basis for holding a connection between the gospel and spiritual life. Spiritual life for the apostle Paul was never detached from the rest of his teachings. He continues to prioritize the message of Jesus's death and resurrection in true spirituality. D. A. Carson, research professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and co-founder of The Gospel Coalition, notes, "We must not think Paul is appealing for uncontrolled mysticism. For him, the love of Christ is not merely something to be privately experienced. Christ's love was supremely displayed in history on a hideous cross outside Jerusalem some years before Paul wrote."<sup>126</sup>

Paul notes the difference between salvation before and after Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Believers in Christ are now, as Paul writes, "with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord [and] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18, ESV). This transformation moves the Christian into the image of Jesus through the Spirit. The Spirit's role in applying salvation and conforming Christians to Jesus highlights another theme in Paul's spiritual theology.

## *The Holy Spirit*

The presence of God is one of the major themes of the Christian scriptures. God is present to his first creatures in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1-2) and to his chosen nation Israel, even when they are in exile. God's presence takes on human form in the person of Jesus, the Son of God (John 1). At the end of his earthly ministry, however, Jesus told his

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<sup>126</sup> Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 170.

followers that it was for their good that he would return to heaven, so that another divine advocate, the Holy Spirit, could come to them (John 16:7). The Holy Spirit becomes God's presence indwelling believers at Pentecost (Acts 2). Then, God's presence is promised to dwell among his people in fullness at the end of time, in the new creation (Rev. 21). From beginning to end, the story of the Bible is a story of God's presence.<sup>127</sup> Theologian Ryan Lister observes, the presence of God is a central *goal* in God's redemptive mission [and] the presence of God is the *agent* by which the Lord accomplishes his redemptive mission."<sup>128</sup> In the current era of redemptive history, between Jesus's ascension to heaven and his return, God is primarily present to his people through his indwelling presence, the Holy Spirit. As such, the Holy Spirit must be central to any understanding of a Christian's life in this era.

Not surprisingly, the Holy Spirit features prominently in the apostle Paul's writings. Paul commands the Ephesians to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18) and to "pray in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:18). He warns the Thessalonians of not to "quench" the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). Paul observes the work of the Holy Spirit in the Galatians (Gal. 3:5) and encourages them to "live by the Spirit," "walk by the Spirit," and "keep in step with the Spirit" and show "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16-25).

Gordon Fee, one of the leading scholars of Paul's theology, highlights the importance of the Spirit in the apostle's letters. Returning to Paul's theology of the Spirit, he suggests, will enable the church to be increasingly effective in its mission. "If the

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<sup>127</sup> See J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019).

<sup>128</sup> Ryan Lister, *The Presence of God: Its Place in the Storyline of Scripture and the Story of Our Lives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 23-24, emphasis original.

church is going to be effective in our postmodern world, we need to stop paying mere lip service to the Spirit and to recapture Paul's perspective: the Spirit as the experienced, empowering return of God's own personal presence in and among us, who enables us to live as a radically eschatological people in the present world while we await the consummation."<sup>129</sup> Gordon continues, "It is fair to say Paul's entire theology without the supporting pinion of the Spirit would crumble into ruins."<sup>130</sup>

British theologian Andrew Wilson writes, "the Spirit for Paul is at the center of Christian discipleship. Repeatedly, where modern evangelicals might be inclined to point people first to the Bible or the gospel... Paul points people first to the Spirit."<sup>131</sup> D. A. Carson observes that Paul wrote to the Romans that the kingdom of God was not a matter of eating or drinking, "but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).<sup>132</sup> Further, Carson notes that Paul prays that his readers would not only know but experience the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13).<sup>133</sup> Paul Miller adds that the apostle Paul makes great effort to demonstrate the role of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 3:20. Miller writes, "Paul is at the edge of human language describing the immensity of the explosion of life, glory, and power that comes from the Spirit of Jesus."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), xv.

<sup>130</sup> Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 7.

<sup>131</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Spirit and Sacrament: An Invitation to Eucharistic Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 90.

<sup>132</sup> Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 169.

<sup>133</sup> Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 169.

<sup>134</sup> Paul Miller, *A Praying Church*, 135.

Paul's theology of the Holy Spirit in renewal includes an emphasis on spiritual gifts. Theologian Sam Storms has written extensively on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He observes, "Paul did not rebuke the Corinthian believers for this eager desire for even more manifestations of the Spirit in the form of gifts. He appears to have commended them for it."<sup>135</sup> For Paul, practicing spiritual gifts are effects of regeneration and a demonstration of the presence of the Spirit. As such, he encourages Christians to "eagerly desire" them (1 Cor. 12:31, 14:1; see also 14:39).

In summary, the Spirit maintains a central role in spiritual renewal according to Paul. The Spirit is responsible for the Christians' regeneration, transformation, and empowerment for life and ministry.

### *Resurrection*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the hallmarks of the apostle Paul's writings. Paul highlights Jesus's resurrection as central to the Christian gospel and the life of the Christian in his sermons (Acts 13:30, 34, 37; 17:18, 32; 23:6, 8; 24:15, 21; 26:8). Paul also emphasizes the centrality of Jesus's resurrection in his letters to First Century churches (Rom. 1:4, 4:25, 6:9, 7:4, 8:11, 34; 1 Cor. 15:1-4, 12-17, 20-21, 29, 32). Christians cannot be saved, according to Paul, without believing in Jesus's bodily resurrection (Rom. 10:9).

But, for Paul, resurrection is not only a historical event in Jesus's life; resurrection is a future hope for all Christians. Paul writes, "By his power God raised the Lord from

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<sup>135</sup> Sam Storms, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 46.

the dead, and he will raise us also” (1 Cor. 6:14). Believers in Jesus’s resurrection are spiritually resurrected (Rom. 6:5; 2 Cor. 4:1). For Paul, baptism is a symbolic representation of resurrection with Jesus (1 Cor. 15:29). He also identifies resurrection as the power for Christian living, especially in suffering (Rom. 8:11; Phil. 3:10). Finally, Christians who are united with Jesus will be physically, bodily raised to new life at his return (1 Cor. 15:42; Phil. 3:11; 2 Tim. 2:18)

Constantine Campbell, a leading scholar of Paul, writes, “The resurrection of Jesus is an event of central importance for Paul’s eschatological understanding.”<sup>136</sup> Campbell notes that the resurrection for Paul (1) demonstrates the victory of Jesus on the cross, (2) represents the spiritual resurrection that Jesus’s followers experience in regeneration, (3) provides real hope for Christians in the current age, including comfort for the grief of death, and (4) guarantees the promise of a future bodily resurrection for all who follow Jesus.<sup>137</sup>

Theologian Keldie Paroschi, writing in 2024, highlights Paul’s Jewish heritage as a motivational factor in his emphasis on resurrection. Paul understands and portrays himself “as a faithful Jew who exemplifies the hope of Israel in his own life, thereby adding a personal dimension to the role of Jesus’s resurrection as vindication for Paul’s claims of faithfulness.”<sup>138</sup> Although the resurrection of Jesus was the single most disputed claim in the 1st Century Jewish community, Paul believed it was essential that

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<sup>136</sup> Constantine Campbell, *Paul and the Hope of Glory: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 167.

<sup>137</sup> Campbell, *Paul and the Hope of Glory*, 167.

<sup>138</sup> Keldie Paroschi, “Resurrection as Vindication: Paul and the Hope of Israel in Acts 23-26.” *Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. 95, Issue 2, 2024, 93.

his countrymen (as well as all people) believe its message. Notably, Paul's background as a member of the Pharisees, who affirmed the possibility of resurrection, prepared him for this new message. "His repeated affirmations of the resurrection identify him not only with his fellow Jews but also with the persecuted righteous of Jewish tradition."<sup>139</sup>

N. T. Wright highlights the centrality and significance of the resurrection in Paul's theology. "For Paul and all the other early Christians, what mattered most was not 'saved souls' being rescued *from* the world and taken to a distant 'heaven,' but the *coming together* of heaven and earth themselves in a great act of cosmic renewal in which human bodies were likewise being renewed to take their place within that renewed world."<sup>140</sup> Wright emphasizes the immediate significance of the resurrection for Christians. It is not a doctrine for later; it is the basis of Christian hope until Jesus returns. He adds, "And this hope for 'resurrection,' for new bodies within a newly reconstituted creation, doesn't just mean rethinking the ultimate 'destination,' the eventual future hope. It changes everything on the way as well."<sup>141</sup> For Wright, the resurrection is an immediately practical doctrine.

Wright notes in *Surprised by Hope* that the resurrection in Paul's theology has implications for discipleship, social involvement, evangelism, world missions.<sup>142</sup> Whenever Christians serve God in the power of the risen Jesus, Wright suggests, they are fulfilling the promise of the resurrection.

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<sup>139</sup> Paroschi, "Resurrection as Vindication," 113.

<sup>140</sup> Wright, *Paul*, 8, emphasis original.

<sup>141</sup> Wright, *Paul*, 8.

<sup>142</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008), 207-290.

Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings... and of course, every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world—all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make.<sup>143</sup>

For Paul, the resurrection means that this current age is transformed into one of deep spiritual life, especially Lovelace's dynamics of prayer, community, and mission.

### *Prayer*

Paul's devotion to prayer can be witnessed in the introductions to nearly every one of his letters. To the Thessalonians, Paul writes, "We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers" (1 Thess. 1:2). He mentions his prayers for the churches in his letters to the Romans (1:8-10), Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:4), Colossians (1:3, 9), Ephesians (1:16-18), Philippians (1:3-5, 9-11), and Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:2-3; 2 Thess. 1:3-4, 11-12), and to Philemon (1:4-6). Paul also encourages the churches to pray for him (Rom. 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11; Eph. 6:19; 2 Thess. 3:1), because he believes God would give him favor through their prayers (Philemon 1:22).

Lovelace suggests Paul's devotion to prayer may be related to the fact that Paul himself was converted in answer to the prayers of the dying martyr Stephen (Acts 7:59-

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<sup>143</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 208.



8:1).<sup>144</sup> Similarly, as Lovelace notes, Paul and Barnabas are called to their first missionary journey out of a prayer meeting in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3).<sup>145</sup>

Prayer is central to the growth of Christians because it represents their relationship with God. For Paul, prayer keeps the Christian in fellowship with God and free from worry and burden. “Do not be anxious about anything,” Paul writes, “but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil. 4:6-7).

Paul’s prayers in the New Testament are largely focused on thanksgiving, intercession (praying for others), and petition (praying for one’s own needs). Thanksgiving is seen in nearly every introductory prayer in Paul’s letters. D. A. Carson notes, “thanksgiving is a fundamental component of the mental framework that largely controls Paul’s intercession.”<sup>146</sup> Thanksgiving does indeed move to intercession in Paul’s prayers. For example, in Philemon, Paul prays “I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers... I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective” (Philem. 4-7). Carson adds, “If we follow Paul’s example, then, we will never overlook the monumental importance of praying for others.”<sup>147</sup> Lastly, Paul’s prayers include petition, though to a lesser degree than thanksgiving and intercession. Paul prays that he would be able to preach the gospel fearlessly, enlisting others to join him in praying for this strength (Eph. 6:20; 1 Thess. 5:25).

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<sup>144</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 170.

<sup>145</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal*, 171.

<sup>146</sup> Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 23.

<sup>147</sup> Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 55.

In summary, Paul's prayer life is expressed in his thanksgiving among the churches. His methods of prayer are visible through his letters and demonstrate the importance of prayer in his mind, life, and ministry.

### *Community*

The apostle Paul, originally named Saul, grew up in a Hebrew culture that was highly social. When he entered the Christian faith and life, Paul was quickly immersed into a deeply connected community (Acts 2:41-47, 4:32-37). Later, Paul's writings became filled with exhortation to living in community. "None of us lives to himself alone," he wrote to the Romans (15:7). Instead, Christians "are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph. 2:20, 22). Yet even a building or temple is not a sufficient metaphor for Paul.

As Lovelace notes, "Paul has to move from architecture to biology to do justice to the vital interconnection between individual Christians. His master image for the church is the human body."<sup>148</sup> Paul's body metaphor shows his belief that the church is a whole greater than its parts. "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). Additionally, Paul views each part of the church as equally valuable. "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (1 Cor. 12:17-18). Paul continues this metaphor in Ephesians: From Christ, "the

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<sup>148</sup> Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life*, 177.

whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph. 4:16).

Paul’s view of Christian community was likely shaped by his unique experience as a Jewish man growing up in a non-Jewish city (Tarsus, in modern-day Turkey). Further, Paul understood his mission to be focused on communicating the gospel and starting new churches among non-Jewish peoples (Gal. 2:8). New Testament scholar Scot McKnight suggests Paul worked tirelessly to establish one unified church across common ethnic, social, and gender barriers, particularly in Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>149</sup> This made the Christian community, according to McKnight, “a fellowship of different,” rather than a fellowship of similar people.<sup>150</sup>

In short, the apostle Paul’s view of community was that it was like a body made up of unique parts, often quite different from one another, to make a whole living, breathing organism much greater than its individual units.

### *Mission*

The apostle Paul is considered the first great missionary in the Christian church. His three missionary journeys are recorded in Acts. His first journey is recorded in Acts 13:4 to 15:35; his second is recorded in 15:36 to 18:22; his third is recorded in 18:23 to 21:27. A later journey to Rome (Acts 27:1-28:16) could be considered a fourth journey,

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<sup>149</sup> Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God’s Design for Life Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 27.

<sup>150</sup> McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents*, 19.

although, unlike the other trips, it only had one destination. Paul's commitment to missionary activity is viewed both in his travel schedule as well as his teachings and writings.

In his letters, Paul urged the church to join God's mission to the world. Even though salvation is initiated by God, Christians have an essential role in his world mission. In Romans 10, Paul quotes Joel 2:32, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (v. 13), then asks rhetorically, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?" (v. 14-15). He concludes by quoting Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (v. 15). To the Corinthians, Paul writes that Christians "are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though Christ was making his appeal through" them (2 Cor. 5:20).

Clearly, Paul understood himself to have a unique and divine calling on his life to mission work among non-Jews. But what motivated Paul's sense of mission? Elliot Clark, a cross-cultural church planter, writes that Paul "often describes the goal of his life in terms of seeking God's approval. The quest for God's praise is what guided Paul's missionary ambition and directed his missionary method."<sup>151</sup> Paul's sense of mission was intrinsically motivated by seeking God's praise, not the approval of his peers. This motivation sustained him through a lifetime of mission.

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<sup>151</sup> Elliot Clark, *Mission Affirmed: Recovering the Missionary Motivation of Paul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 26.

Further, for Paul, it was not sufficient to merely believe the gospel and share it with others in mission. New Testament scholar Michael J. Gorman has suggested that Paul's key contribution to mission is that we must "become" the gospel. He writes, "those of us who read Paul's letters as Christian Scripture need also to participate in the advance of the gospel by becoming the gospel, in word, in deed, and—if we are faithful and it becomes necessary—in suffering."<sup>152</sup> Paul demonstrated this embodiment of his own teaching in his willingness to work tirelessly and even suffer for the message he was proclaiming.

Paul's motivation and identity enabled him to a lifestyle of mission, not merely a commitment to travel on isolated missionary journeys. Wesley Thomas Davis, writing in the theological journal *Themelios*, adds that for Paul, suffering in mission is not merely a result of faithfulness but also "as a means by which God's mission is furthered, as Paul intimates in 2 Corinthians."<sup>153</sup> In other words, Paul's mission was fulfilled through both his proclamation of the gospel and the demonstration of its power through his endurance in suffering.

In summary, Paul's motivation for mission was attaining God's approval, his method was an identification with the gospel message and power, and his willingness to suffer revealed his commitment to mission and magnified its effectiveness.

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<sup>152</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 63.

<sup>153</sup> Wesley Thomas Davis, "Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission," *Themelios* Vol. 40, Issue 2, accessed October 16, 2024. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/becoming-the-gospel-paul-participation-and-mission/>.

### *Summary of Pauline Theology*

In summary, Paul's theology of spiritual renewal focuses on the gospel, regeneration, spiritual life, the Holy Spirit, and resurrection. Additionally, his vast teachings and writings on prayer, community, and mission demonstrate a life of spiritual renewal in practice.

### **Organizational Culture**

The review of literature in the areas of Richard Lovelace's spiritual renewal dynamics and Pauline theology is now followed by a consideration of organizational culture. The purpose of this study is to understand how pastors and churches can influence their congregational culture through the principles of organizational culture.

### *Understanding Organizational Culture*

The word "culture" derives from the Latin "cultus," which means "care."<sup>154</sup> Culture, then, is a factor in the human experience of a collective society, however large or small. In *Theories of Culture*, anthropologist Kathryn Tanner recognizes the importance of culture in its general form. "Although less than one hundred years old, the modern anthropological meaning of 'culture' now enjoys a remarkable influence within humanistic disciplines of the academy and within commonsense discussions of daily life."<sup>155</sup> Tanner that culture's place in understanding human society is now "comparable

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<sup>154</sup> Daniel Coyle, *Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups* (New York, NY: Bantam, 2018), xiv.

<sup>155</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), ix.

to such categories as gravity in physics, disease in medicine, evolution in biology.”<sup>156</sup>

Culture, then, is an important feature in the social fabric of any gathering of individuals.

The concept of culture has been applied to the business world for several decades and is now a popular aspect of corporate experience. Many companies have established a department of culture, which involves training its employees in its corporate history, traditions, values, and expectations.<sup>157</sup> While an organization’s culture might be described in many ways, it is a difficult term to define.

Boris Groysberg and others, writing for the *Harvard Business Review*, have provided a helpful overview of organizational culture in general.

Culture is the tacit social order of an organization: It shapes attitudes and behaviors in wide-ranging and durable ways. Cultural norms define what is encouraged, discouraged, accepted, or rejected within a group. When properly aligned with personal values, drives, and needs, culture can unleash tremendous amounts of energy toward a shared purpose and foster an organization’s capacity to thrive.<sup>158</sup>

Groysberg highlights the challenge of defining culture: it is “tacit.” Culture seeks to describe the assumed and often unspoken traits, values, and priorities of the organization.

Daniel Coyle’s *The Culture Code* has been one of the most popular books on organizational culture since its publication in 2018. Coyle states that “While successful culture can look and feel like magic, the truth is it’s not. Culture is a set of living relationships working together toward a shared goal. It’s not something you are. It’s

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<sup>156</sup> Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, ix.

<sup>157</sup> For example, Veterans United in Columbia, Missouri has a well-developed department of culture. See <https://careers.veteransunited.com/culture/>. Accessed September 30, 2024.

<sup>158</sup> Boris Groysberg, “The Leader’s Guide to Corporate Culture,” *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2018.

something you do.”<sup>159</sup> Coyle believes group culture is one of the most powerful forces in any society, organization, team, or family. Cultures that are strong and healthy, Coyle asserts, are created by a specific set of skills, including (1) building safety, (2) sharing vulnerability, and (3) establishing purpose.<sup>160</sup>

But while an organization’s culture can be rightly aligned to foster great collaboration and mission, it can also hold back the group’s collective mission more invisibly than failures of explicit belief and strategy. A healthy culture is hard to cultivate and even more difficult to sustain. Coyle states that organizations must identify and rank their priorities, wrestling with choices that will define its identity.<sup>161</sup> Then, once an organization’s priorities are set, its leaders must “be ten times as clear about [their] priorities as [they] think they should be.”<sup>162</sup>

Why is clarity so crucial when establishing organizational culture? According to a study by *Inc.* magazine, corporate executives believed that 64 percent of their employees would be able to name the company’s top three priorities. In reality, only two percent could accurately do so.<sup>163</sup> Even when executives understand their business’s priorities, clear and constant communication is required to move the priorities from theory into culture in the life of their organization.

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<sup>159</sup> Coyle, *The Culture Code*, xx.

<sup>160</sup> Coyle, *The Culture Code*, xix.

<sup>161</sup> Coyle, *The Culture Code*, 229.

<sup>162</sup> Coyle, *The Culture Code*, 229.

<sup>163</sup> Coyle, *The Culture Code*, 229.



## *A Local Church's Culture*

Reviewing the research on organizational culture demonstrates that culture is highly important to church life, even though it is difficult to define and measure. Research and publishing on organizational culture in churches is minimal compared to its place in the fields of business and education. Nonetheless, a review of leading theory on congregational culture will be considered.

### **Defining Church Culture**

Aubrey Malphrus of Dallas Theological Seminary is a popular author in the areas of Christian leadership and church growth. His 2013 book, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern and Shape Your Church Culture*, explores the role of culture in local churches.<sup>164</sup>

Malphrus states that culture is essential for church leaders to understand for eight reasons, including that it “is vital to effective ministry” and “is essential to leaders if they are to lead their established churches well.”<sup>165</sup> J. R. Woodward writes, “More than a strategy, vision or plan, the unseen culture of a church powerfully shapes her ability to grow, mature and live missionally. Successes and failures alike in church planting confirm the role that the culture of a congregation plays. The unstated assumptions in a

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<sup>164</sup> Aubrey Malphrus, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern and Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books).

<sup>165</sup> Malphrus, *Look Before You Lead*, 17.

congregation's culture either aid or hinder it in its mission."<sup>166</sup> Culture, then, plays a key role in any church's expression of theology and practice.

Despite its importance in the life of a congregation, church culture is difficult to define. Malphrus admits that defining the word "culture" was "the most difficult task in writing this book."<sup>167</sup> Finally, Malphrus settles on a definition of a church's culture as "the *unique expression of the interaction of the church's shared beliefs and its values, which explain its behavior in general and displays its unique identity in particular.*"<sup>168</sup>

Malphrus describes church culture with the illustration of an apple. The apple's core represents a church's beliefs, its inner flesh represents its values, and its outer skin represents its behaviors. This illustration provides a helpful framework for understanding church culture.

## **Beliefs**

Malphrus writes that a church's core represents its beliefs. Just as an apple's core is its most fundamental level, a church's beliefs lie at the center of its culture. Each congregation must decide its positions on biblical and practical doctrines. A church's doctrinal beliefs serve to identify it with a broader tradition and provide boundaries for its expression of faith. But a church's culture is also established by its practical doctrines, such as its beliefs about how to manage authority and what type of technology to utilize. For example, the role of women in leadership is a significant topic in modern

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<sup>166</sup> J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 19.

<sup>167</sup> Malphrus, *Look Before You Lead*, 7.

<sup>168</sup> Malphrus, *Look Before You Lead*, 20, emphasis original.

congregations and will establish its culture in important ways. A healthy church, according to Malphrus, requires clear beliefs in order to set expectations for church members, determine a potential leader's fit with current leaders, and provide stability to the congregation.<sup>169</sup>

## Values

Church consultant Lyle Schaller writes that "The most important single element of any corporate, congregational, or denominational culture... is its value system."<sup>170</sup>

Values are typically words, phrases, or statements that represent an organizations most important principles, standards, and ideals. Shawn Pope and Arild Waeraas, writing for the *Harvard Business Review*, state that core values in any organization have the potential to define company culture and guide decision-making. But values can only fulfill this potential if they are well-known throughout the organization.

Many churches use key words like gospel, community, worship, mission, renewal, prayer, truth, experience, presence, and stewardship. Values can also be represented as statements. Pope and Waeraas suggest representing core values as (1) creative, (2) brief, (3) memorable, (4) distinctive, and (5) visible. For example, Toyota's value of service is represented as "We go the extra mile." Facebook says, "Move fast and

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<sup>169</sup> Malphrus, *Look Before You Lead*, 56-60.

<sup>170</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *Getting Things Done* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 152.

break things.” Disney values “fun, family entertainment.”<sup>171</sup> These simple statements can be more memorable and can affect culture more easily than key words.

In a local church, values help define how a congregation differs from other nearby congregations and give their congregants a sense of shared mission and purpose.

## **Behaviors**

To return to the apple illustration, a church’s behaviors relate to its culture as an apple’s skin covers its outermost layer. Congregational behaviors include a church’s language, activities, programs, facilities, rituals, and use of technology. Malphrus explains, “The behaviors and outward expressions are what an observer, such as a visitor, would see, sense, and hear as he or she encounters a church’s culture.”<sup>172</sup> No church will be able to develop a certain desired culture without behaviors and practices that support it. As with values, behaviors must be repeated in order to fully affect congregational culture.<sup>173</sup>

## **Summary of Church Culture**

Malphrus summarizes: “In short, a church’s organizational culture is its unique expression of its shared values and beliefs.”<sup>174</sup> A church’s culture is integral to its health and flourishing, and, though difficult to define, is an essential factor in its ministry. A

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<sup>171</sup> Shawn Pope and Arild Waeraas, “How to Create Company Values That Actually Resonate,” *Harvard Business Review* (blog), October 31, 2023. Accessed October 15, 2024. <https://hbr.org/2023/10/how-to-create-company-values-that-actually-resonate>.

<sup>172</sup> Malphrus, *Look Before You Lead*, 21.

<sup>173</sup> Coyle, *The Culture Code*, 229.

<sup>174</sup> Malphrus, *Look Before You Lead*, 20.

church with a well-defined and positive culture will be more likely to shape the lives of its members toward its desired goals.

### *Culture and Leadership*

Culture and leadership are intimately connected, and thus we will do well to do a sustained reflect on the nature of spiritual leadership for the sake of gospel culture.

Groysberg and company suggest the following of organization culture:

For better *and* worse, culture and leadership are inextricably linked. Founders and influential leaders often set new cultures in motion and imprint values and assumptions that persist for decades. Over time an organization's leaders can also shape culture, through both conscious and unconscious actions (sometimes with unintended consequences). The best leaders we have observed are fully aware of the multiple cultures within which they are embedded, can sense when change is required, and can deftly influence the process.<sup>175</sup>

The authors express that it is the leaders that can establish and inhabit—or diminish and undermine—organizational culture more than anyone. With these factors in mind, how can leaders embrace and embody gospel culture in such a way that their congregations take the shape of gospel culture? What are the shared, pervasive, enduring, and implicit forms of leadership that will cultivate, sustain, and multiply gospel culture?

In a local church, pastors and leaders play a unique role in its culture by distinguishing it from the broader culture it is situated within. Woodward suggests “Leaders of God’s people uniquely contribute to the cultivation of a culture distinct and

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<sup>175</sup> Groysberg, “The Leader’s Guide to Corporate Culture.”

different from the dominant culture.”<sup>176</sup> But how do leaders contribute to this cultivation of culture?

In a graduate seminar at Covenant Theological Seminary, Dane Ortlund, author of the bestselling book *Gentle and Lowly*, explained that church culture is both “taught and caught.”<sup>177</sup> It is taught through leaders’ sermons, ministries, and midweek communications. But it must also be “caught” through the lives of its leaders. The culture must be modeled from its highest levels of leadership to the volunteers in its ministries.

Malphrus includes sixteen “make or break” questions about church culture in *Look Before You Lead*. These questions are intended to help pastors and leaders understand their current congregational culture, envision a better future, and prioritize areas for growth. Several of the questions are general, including: “Have you carefully identified your actual core values so that you understand what truly empowers and guides your church and explains why you do what you do or do not do what you should do?”<sup>178</sup> But culture clarifying questions should also reach the level of daily meetings: “Have you crafted a personal, individualized leader development plan for your own growth as a leader in your church?”<sup>179</sup> Leaders must answer key questions like these to affect organizational change in their environments.

Lastly, Malphrus believes the renewal of the pastor is a key feature in establishing and maintaining a healthy church culture. He writes, “As the pastor of the church goes, so

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<sup>176</sup> Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 33.

<sup>177</sup> Dane Ortlund, “Gospel Culture.” DMin seminar at Covenant Theological Seminary, August 14-18, 2023.

<sup>178</sup> Malphrus, *Look Before You Lead*, 181.

<sup>179</sup> Malphrus, *Look Before You Lead*, 182.

goes the church.”<sup>180</sup> Without a growing pastor, churches are not likely to grow as organizations. Malphrus suggests that pastors cultivate their own spiritual renewal by developing strong friendships, finding a mentor or coach, and making time for continuing education and professional development.

### *Summary of Organizational Culture*

In summary, much business literature focuses on the development of organizational culture, and culture is a growing field within Christian and church leadership studies. Culture is the tacit environment of a congregation, and while it can be clearly defined or unspoken, it will have a significant influence on its congregants’ shared life and ministry. Churches can create alignment around their beliefs and mission by crafting and reinforcing deliberate values and practices. For any new ministry or attitude to become deeply engrained in a congregation, it must reach the level of its church culture.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

In light of the literature examined, Richard Lovelace’s dynamics of spiritual renewal present a unified theology of spiritual growth in an individual and in a congregation. Paul’s theology of spiritual renewal gives a biblical vision and framework for Christian growth and maturity. And organizational culture can be studied in order for pastors and leaders to discern how to integrate spiritual life principles and values into the life of their congregation.

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<sup>180</sup> Malphrus, *Look Before You Lead*, 184.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore how pastors in the Reformed tradition promote spiritual renewal among their congregants. The assumption of this study was that pastors have learned important principles for fostering sanctification from their ministry experience and from applying Richard Lovelace's theories of spiritual renewal, as described initially in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. While many pastors are not directly familiar with Lovelace's name and work, to what degree have his theories penetrated thought and practice in Reformed churches in the US?

In order to address this question, the research identified three main areas of focus for the literature review. First, the study focused on Lovelace's pneumodynamics, which are his particular theories of spiritual renewal. Second, the study compared Lovelace's theories to a Pauline theology of sanctification. Third, the study explored Lovelace's theories in light of theories of organizational culture for lifelong learning.

To examine these areas more closely, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do Reformed pastors describe their theology of spiritual renewal?
2. How do Reformed pastors promote spiritual renewal among their congregants?
  - a. Through Prayer
  - b. Through Community
  - c. Through Mission
3. What spiritual renewal outcomes do Reformed pastors desire to see among their congregants?



4. In what ways and to what extent do Reformed pastors' promotion of spiritual renewal compare to Lovelace's theories?

The methods of basic qualitative research were employed to gain an understanding of the thoughts and experiences of Reformed pastors. A study of relevant literature has been provided in the previous chapter. In chapter four, the researcher provides the analysis of in depth interviews with six pastors of Reformed churches. In chapter five, information gained from the literature was integrated with analysis from the interview data and the researcher's experiences towards applications for ministry leaders.

This chapter addressed the benefits and appropriateness of qualitative research for this study, selection criteria for the interviewees, the structure and process of the interviews, the methods of interview data collection and analysis, the position of the researcher, and the limitations of the study.

### **Design of the Study**

Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, in their book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation (Fourth Edition)*, identify four characteristics of qualitative research: it focuses on meaning and understanding, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, it is an inductive process, and the product is richly descriptive.<sup>181</sup> This qualitative study accomplished these four characteristics in the following ways.

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<sup>181</sup> Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation, 4th Edition* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 15-18.

First, the research conducted was determined to understand the ways in which the interviewees, which were identified to be representative of a greater collection of pastors and churches, understand their roles and the world around them. Merriam and Tisdell write, “Basically, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”<sup>182</sup> Utilizing the techniques described by Booth and others in *The Craft of Research*, primary and secondary questions were developed by the researcher in order to focus the study’s usefulness in field application.<sup>183</sup>

Second, the researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.<sup>184</sup> The researcher accomplished this through careful review of relevant literature, both contemporary and historical, and through the semi-structured interviews. The researcher’s background, which is similar to the interviewees’ backgrounds, allowed for fluid conversations around the topic. The researcher’s background and biases are elaborated below.

Third, qualitative research is an inductive process. This study analyzed the researcher’s interviews, historical and contemporary literature, and his own pastoral experience to develop generalized theories and suggestions for practice around the topic of spiritual renewal. This study is not a thesis, where a predetermined belief or assumption is being tested. Instead, it is a qualitative study that sought to produce a grounded theories explaining the data.

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<sup>182</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 15. See also figure 2.1 on page 42.

<sup>183</sup> Wayne C. Booth et al., *The Craft of Research, Fourth Edition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 33.

<sup>184</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 7.

Fourth, the product of this qualitative research is richly descriptive. Braun and Clarke note that a significant feature of qualitative research “is that it uses *words* as data.”<sup>185</sup> The researcher’s study generated a final product that offers qualitative data through unique and expressive language in its findings. The researcher’s primary goal was that it would be comprehensible and compelling to readers inside and outside of the Reformed tradition. According to Booth and others, the most significant question in research is “So what?”<sup>186</sup> Thus, the researcher hopes this study made an original contribution to Christian theology and ministry practice.

This study employed a basic qualitative research design and conducted semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. This qualitative method provided for the discovery of more comprehensive and descriptive data from participant perspectives.

### **Participant Sample Selection**

This research required participants who are able to communicate in depth about spiritual theology, spiritual renewal, and ministry practice. Therefore, this study used “purposeful sampling” in participant selection. According to Merriam and Tisdell, “Purposeful Sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can

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<sup>185</sup> Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners, 1st Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2013), 3.

<sup>186</sup> Booth, *The Craft of Research*, 43.

be learned.”<sup>187</sup> To gain data towards best practices, the participants self-reported to the researcher that they had more than ten years of experience in Reformed churches and ministries and were intentional about promoting spiritual renewal in their congregations.

To minimize variables in the data that were not of primary focus, the researcher chose participants for continuity in several areas. The research questions do not focus on theological, gender, or professional role differences. Therefore, each interviewee was male, which is typical of ministers in Reformed traditions. Each was between the ages of 40-55, which provided enough time for completion of seminary training and approximately ten to twenty years of ministry experience, and yet still likely to be familiar with spiritual renewal principles taught in the past two decades. Each participant was presently serving in a pastoral role of a church in the Reformed tradition.

Participants were purposefully chosen to provide variation in geography, denomination, and educational institution of professional training. These forms of variation provide for breadth of experience and understanding of spiritual formation within the particular theology and practice of pastors from the Reformed theological position and tradition.

Each participant was a previous acquaintance of the researcher, which provided for ease in access and trust building. They were invited to participate via an introductory e-mail, followed by a personal phone call or text message. All expressed interest and gave written informed consent to participate. In addition, each participant signed a “Research Participant Consent Form” to respect and to protect the human rights of the participants. The Human Rights Risk Level Assessment is “minimal” to “no risk”

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<sup>187</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 96.

according to the Seminary IRB Guidelines. The following is a sample of this consent form.

### **RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by Jeremy Linneman to investigate dynamics of spiritual renewal for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Covenant Theological Seminary. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, and/or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

- 1) The purpose of the research is to explore how pastors in the Reformed tradition promote lifelong spiritual renewal among their congregants
- 2) Potential benefits of the research may include a deeper understanding of sanctification and spiritual renewal, lively conversations around one theologian's influential theories on spiritual renewal, and the opportunity for participants to develop their own theories of spiritual renewal and its application more fully in local churches.
- 3) The research process will include one video interview each with six participants who identify as Reformed pastors. The interviews will be between 60 and 90 minutes each, following four main research questions and several additional questions. The interviews will be recorded for review during the dissertation research process and deleted upon completion of the final dissertation.
- 4) Participants in this research will answer questions that are mostly theoretical, asking them to reflect on their own studies and experiences. There will be no required tasks beyond the pre-interview steps described here and the 60-90 minute interview.
- 5) Potential discomforts or stresses: Participants may wish to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their own study and pursuit of sanctification in their lives and churches, but this will not be an essential demand of the interview process.
- 6) Potential risks: None
- 7) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.
- 8) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.

- 9) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the study.

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Printed Name and Signature of Researcher Date

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Printed Name and Signature of Participant Date

*Please sign both copies. Keep one. Return the other to the researcher. Thank you.*

Research at Covenant Theological Seminary which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Director, Doctor of Ministry; Covenant Theological Seminary; 12330 Conway Road; St. Louis, MO 63141; Phone (314) 434-4044.

### **Data Collection**

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering. The open-ended nature of interview questions facilitates the ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues in order to explore them more thoroughly. Ultimately, these methods enabled this study to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants.<sup>188</sup>

The researcher performed a pilot test of the interview protocol to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature but evolved around the explanations and descriptions that emerged from doing constant comparison work during the interviewing process. Coding and categorizing the data while continuing the process of interviewing also allowed for the emergence of new sources of data.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 74.

<sup>189</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 74.

The researcher interviewed six participants for between 60 and 90 minutes each. Prior to the interview, the participants received an invitation to participate in the study by email. Once they agreed to participate, interviewees provided their basic demographic information, including the following information: age, current ministry position held, years of service in current previous roles, and formal education completed. This background information enabled the researcher to notice trends in education, geographic context, age, and experience in ministry related to the theme of spiritual renewal.

In order to accommodate participant schedules, the interviews were conducted virtually, using the online platform Zoom. Zoom allows for the video and audio recording of meetings, storing the files digitally for the account holder's future use. The researcher secured permission to record these interviews with the understanding that the files would not be shared and would be deleted upon submission of the final project. By conducting the six interviews in a single month (September 2024), the researcher completed the data gathering in the course of four weeks, where external cultural conditions would be most similar due to shortness of time between interviews. Directly after each interview, the researcher wrote field notes with descriptive and reflective observations on the interview time.

The interview protocol contained the following questions.

1. Tell me about a season when you experienced spiritual renewal in your ministry.
2. What resources have been helpful in promoting your congregation's spiritual renewal?
3. What are some ways you promote spiritual renewal through prayer?
4. What are some ways you promote spiritual renewal through community?

5. What are some ways you promote spiritual renewal through mission?
6. How has your preaching aimed to promote the spiritual renewal of your congregants?
7. How would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit in your church's renewal?

## **Data Analysis**

The researcher personally transcribed each interview from the digital recording in Zoom. By personally typing each interview, the researcher also noted the participants' moods, inflection points, and body language along with their spoken responses. This study utilized the constant comparison method of routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process. This method provided for the ongoing revision, clarification, and evaluation of the resultant data categories.<sup>190</sup>

When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files, they were coded and analyzed according to the research questions. In particular, to compare the data to Richard Lovelace's theories of spiritual renewal, coding for analysis included participant references to Lovelace's key terms described in chapter two. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying (1) common themes, patterns, and emotional responses across the variation of participants; and (2) congruence or discrepancy between the different participants. The data was analyzed during the process of interviewing, while transcribing the conversations, and while categorizing into various themes, allowing multiple avenues of data analysis and thematic discovery.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 159.

<sup>191</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 196-197.



## Researcher Position

Merriam and Tisdell describe six competencies for the qualitative researcher: a questioning stance with regard to your work and life context, a high tolerance for ambiguity, being a careful observer, asking good questions, thinking inductively, and comfort with writing.<sup>192</sup> The researcher endeavored to embody these six competencies throughout the dissertation process.

In qualitative research, as Merriam and Tisdell explain, “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis... [and] the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that can have impact on the study.”<sup>193</sup> Therefore, it is important for researchers to be aware of their individual biases, including their personal beliefs and experiences, and how those biases will affect the study.

The researcher acknowledges that he has been shaped by several positions. First, the researcher is an ordained pastor in the Reformed tradition and has been educated in educational settings where spiritual renewal is a familiar concept and Richard Lovelace’s theories are well-received. These backgrounds allow the researcher to be familiar with the struggles and challenges of pastoring a local congregation. However, the researcher has less experience outside Reformed congregations and lacks a comprehensive understanding of how other traditions understand and seek to promote spiritual renewal.

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<sup>192</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 18-19.

<sup>193</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 16.

## **Study Limitations**

As stated in the previous section, participants interviewed for this study were limited to those serving in pastoral ministry in a Reformed congregation in the U.S. Therefore, the study's sample is quite narrow for depth of focus in light of limited time and resources for the research. The study's findings may be appropriately applied to other pastors in the Reformed tradition in the U.S. In addition, some of the study's findings may be generalized to other similar Christian ministers and leaders in other traditions, cultural contexts, and age groups. Readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of these conclusions on spiritual renewal should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context.

Further study is needed to develop a more comprehensive evaluation of how pastors and ministry leaders understand and seek to promote spiritual renewal. Further studies are needed to understand the perspectives of those outside the Reformed tradition.

In this chapter, this study's research methods have been described. The methods of qualitative research were chosen as the research protocol given their appropriate fit for this type of research. The constant comparative method was chosen as the method of analysis since it is a sound means of developing a grounded theory. In the next chapter, the particular data included in the interviews will be presented and analyzed.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges facing pastors and ministry leaders in promoting spiritual renewal in their churches and ministries. This chapter provides the findings of the six pastoral interviews and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions. In order to address the challenge of promoting spiritual renewal, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do Reformed pastors and leaders describe their theology of spiritual renewal?
2. How do Reformed pastors and leaders promote spiritual renewal among their congregants?
  - a. Through Prayer
  - b. Through Community
  - c. Through Mission
3. How do Reformed pastors and leaders integrate spiritual renewal into the culture of their congregation or organization?
4. In what ways and to what extent do Reformed pastors' promotion of spiritual renewal compare to Lovelace's theories?

#### *Introductions to Participants and Context*

The researcher selected pastors and ministry leaders to participate in this study. All names and identifiable participant information have been changed to protect identity.

These six individuals each received at least a graduate-level seminary education in the Reformed tradition. Each has served in local church ministry for at least ten years. The participants include a senior pastor, two associate pastors, a church staff director, a seminary vice president, and a Christian non-profit executive director. Each participant was male and between the ages of 40 and 55.

### **Describing Spiritual Renewal**

The first research question sought to determine how pastors and leaders describe spiritual renewal. The researcher asked each participant to “tell me about a season when you experienced spiritual renewal in your ministry.” The researcher was careful to understand how each participant described their theology of spiritual renewal.

The researcher also asked each participant, “What resources have been helpful in promoting your congregation’s (or ministry’s) spiritual renewal?”

### *Stories of Spiritual Renewal*

Several leaders described a season of spiritual renewal in their formative years with great fondness. During his college years, C. Hamilton,<sup>194</sup> the executive director of a Christian non-profit, participated in a summer project with a major ministry, serving in a tourist town. He spent his summer working in the community, serving alongside other young believers, and sharing his faith. Hamilton found he was experiencing something profound. He attributes the renewal to this combination of factors, where each was increasing the power of the other. His time sharing the faith was strengthened by Bible

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<sup>194</sup> Each interviewee’s name has been replaced with a pseudonym to maintain anonymity.

reading, which was strengthened by friendships. With all these factors in place, Hamilton said, “Scripture was popping and then Scripture was sticking.” After the summer, he felt interested in vocational ministry for the first time. The renewal stuck in his life, and he said it was true for many others.

J. Kramer, a staff pastor at a large church, had a similar experience of spiritual renewal in his youth. He was a teenager when his traditional Protestant church began to experience a spiritual awakening through a series of evangelistic meetings. He later realized the theology of the itinerant preacher was not entirely biblical. But he also vividly remembered, for the first time, gatherings where leaders publicly confessed sin and sought God’s renewing work in their lives. Kramer believed it was “the public repentance of sin, and the willingness to walk in that before the church [that] brought a season of renewal to the church.” For him, church could no longer be a mere formality. He believed the church could be a place of spiritual renewal through applying the gospel and living in spiritual renewal.

Several of the respondents described a more recent season of spiritual renewal. D. Smith, a staff member at a medium-sized church, described a season of renewal he experienced between 2021 and 2023. His church was about four years old and had come through Covid without significant loss of membership. The church did not make significant changes in its teaching or ministry, but Smith says the church began growing both inwardly and outwardly. He saw that “a lot of people began sharing common experiences where God’s grace was fresh.” He remembers hearing testimonies of spiritual transformation from members in Sunday gatherings, small groups, and informal conversations.

Smith said his church specifically taught on the gospel and dynamics of spiritual renewal with regularity. He explained that members began to see where they were living in a type of “spiritual performance” rather than in the freedom of acceptance in the gospel. Church attendees were seeing their priorities reoriented, Smith said. They became more devoted to one another and less superficial in their relationships. He described a combination of teaching God’s grace, deep relationships and community, and a sense of mission that contributed to the season of spiritual renewal.

P. Milton, a staff pastor of a church of several thousand members, believes he is currently ministering in a season of spiritual renewal. He sees this mostly in his church community’s care for one another. He believes the renewal followed a season of his congregation’s spiritual decline, which was most significant in 2019 and 2020. “Everybody forgets how bad 2019 was,” Milton said. It was a year of racial tension and cultural pressure. Those pressures were heightened by the Covid pandemic, which began in March 2020, causing many of his church members to remain at home for many months. He said his church hit a low point in unity and sense of belonging. “We lost a lot of church, maybe 40 percent.” But the decline was followed by a season of renewal. “We’re made to be connected; we’re made to be with people; we’re made to worship together,” Milton said. As the pandemic restrictions lifted, his church began to recover its attendance but with mostly new attendees. To what does Milton attribute this shift in renewal? He was not quite sure. But he knows it involved “a supernatural outpouring of people who have a different vital interest in their faith.” No longer were nominal congregants attending merely out of routine; now they were deeply interested and desiring authentic relationship.

Similarly, R. Murphy, who founded his church about a decade ago, remembered a season in 2022 when his congregation was recovering from the Covid pandemic. “We had gotten through a couple really hard years,” he explained. “We’d lost a good chunk of our members through Covid, like a lot of churches did, for various reasons.” The losses experienced in 2020 and 2021 were difficult for Murphy and his leaders. But they also saw an opportunity in the change. “Every week, we started seeing new people kind of make their way through the doors.” He saw a new enthusiasm and energy in the people visiting. The current members of the church were reenergized by the influx of new members.

Murphy’s gatherings began to fill again, and “practical things like the budget started to turn itself around.” As the congregation experienced growth in attendance and giving, it also experienced freshness in spiritual life and community relationships. The leaders were reminded why they were so excited to start the church about a decade earlier, and it seemed like they were fully engaged in God’s mission again. “It was just such a great time coming out of what we came out of, and I’ll probably always remember it,” Murphy said. Spiritual and congregational renewal were happening simultaneously and, as a result, the church was able to be healthier organizationally and more engaged in reaching its community.

K. Graham serves as a vice president of a large theological seminary. He reflected on a season of spiritual renewal he experienced while in seminary. He was attending a fast-growing church that was consistent in teaching the gospel and had a strong sense of community and mission. He witnessed the church grow by hundreds of people, often by conversions and dramatic life change, in only a few years. Graham suggested that the

church's unique commitment to personal holiness and worship was a leading factor in their renewal. He said the liturgy in the Sunday gathering was carefully crafted to help members regularly confess their sins alongside others. This was a form of "rehearsing the gospel." He adds, "I felt like that brought on renewal. It's hard to explain how exactly it works but it seemed like the Spirit used those experiences to anchor me more in truth and situate me in remembrance of this whole story." He described a fresh sense of hope in "looking to Christ" when he recognized brokenness within himself. He was not alone in this renewal either; he believed almost every member of the church was experiencing similar transformation at once.

Like each of the respondents, Graham reflected on his season of renewal with a sense of gratitude and bewilderment. He could not exactly explain how it happened and knew he did not create it himself and thus could not reproduce it. But he, like each of the other leaders, hoped to experience a season of heightened spiritual renewal again.

### *Resources for Spiritual Renewal*

Each pastor or leader was asked about the resources they utilize in promoting their own congregation's spiritual renewal. Respondents gave books, sermons, curricula, and historical lessons as sources of their own congregation's renewal. They believed these resources would be potentially helpful in promoting renewal beyond their own context. Several leaders mentioned Lovelace directly (knowing that Lovelace was a focus of the overall project) and others mentioned those he directly influenced.

Milton had read Lovelace's *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* about ten years ago. Like many others, he had heard pastor Tim Keller quote Lovelace in sermons and books. Upon reading Lovelace firsthand, he remembers thinking, "Lovelace is the gospel for sure." He



still believes Lovelace's theories on the gospel and spiritual renewal are timely for the church today and would recommend them to his parishioners.

Hamilton had read Lovelace only recently. But he learned spiritual renewal dynamics from the same sources that Lovelace did. Hamilton studied Jonathan Edwards's writings on the Great Awakenings and other historic revivals. He believes "the way revival spreads in a group is by the knowledge of how God has worked in the past and elsewhere in our day." Hamilton believed if more Christians studied revival history, from Lovelace and others, much more spiritual power would be available today.

Kramer reflected on the "Sonship" curriculum by the late pastor Jack Miller, a contemporary of Lovelace's at nearby Westminster Theological Seminary. Miller's discipleship curriculum used much of Lovelace's framework for the gospel and personal renewal, especially around receiving God's fatherly love. Kramer believes these are the core components of renewal: the gospel, the human heart, God's love, and community.

Smith also mentioned the "Sonship" curriculum as having a profound influence on his understanding of the gospel. He described a model of sanctification, closely aligned with Lovelace's own emphasis, that he found encouraging. He remembers discovering, "It can appear to you in the moment that your heart is in decline or you're backsliding. But all along the way the Lord is leading you and you're on this trajectory toward more Christlikeness." Smith came across this resource while experience a difficult season of personal suffering. He found in the Sonship curriculum a model for Christian life that included "hills and valleys... spikes and falls." It helped make sense of his own experience and gave him relief that he wasn't alone in his personal journey.

Graham made a quick connection between resources and teaching people to pray. He has found Don Whitney's book *Praying the Bible* to be a helpful tool in spurring his students toward deeper prayer. The book, he explained, simply helps readers engage a Psalm or two each day, personalizing them in prayer and repeating them to God. He said he personally has been "helped as a Christian by learning to anchor my prayer in Scripture so they're not all over the place." He cited Colossians 3:16 for motivation. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," he said. "One way to do that is to learn to pray [the Psalms] or let that be a springboard to prayer." He expressed that praying the Psalms, along with Whitney's book, had been helpful in both his own life and encouraging his students toward personal renewal.

Murphy's church experienced a season of renewal in 2022, and during that year, pastor Dane Ortlund's book *Gentle and Lowly* was offered to churches in bulk orders without charge. The book emphasizes Jesus's relational nature, his humility, and his compassion toward those struggling with sin and suffering. Murphy felt it had a major impression on his members, especially given the timing of the Covid pandemic and the renewal his church was experiencing. The themes of the gospel and God's love were key for Murphy.

Murphy also mentioned Tim Keller as a prominent influence in his life, theology, and ministry practice. Murphy especially pointed to Keller's final years while fighting cancer. Murphy listened to several interviews with Keller and felt encouraged to continue pursuing renewal, preaching the gospel, and shepherding his local church. Keller's theme of gospel renewal, found mostly in his book *Center Church*, was shared across his leadership team.

### *Summary of Describing Spiritual Renewal*

All six leaders gave their own descriptions of spiritual renewal. They described a season in which they personally experienced renewal on an individual or corporate level. Their descriptions revealed their understanding of spiritual renewal. The experiences of these leaders were analyzed and coded.

Each leader also provided the resources on spiritual renewal that they have found most helpful in their own ministries. These resources were analyzed and compared briefly to Richard Lovelace's theories of spiritual renewal.

### **Promoting Spiritual Renewal**

The second research question sought to determine how pastors and leaders promote spiritual renewal in their churches and ministries. The researcher asked three questions on the theme of promoting spiritual renewal. Participants were asked to describe how they promote renewal through prayer, through community, and through mission.

#### *Prayer*

Each pastor or leader could describe the role of prayer in their church's plan for their members' growth and renewal. How each leader promoted prayer across their church varied widely, but common themes emerge.

Smith said his church can rightly be described as a praying church. They do not only value it in principle, but the church actively prays with consistency and commitment. Smith believes that the church does not merely equip its members for their own private prayer lives, they also have an opportunity to seek God together in corporate

prayer. This corporate prayer has taken many forms at his church. When the church was smaller, Smith said that each worship gathering included congregational prayer, where members and visitors were given the opportunity to pray aloud for a particular topic or need. As the church grew too large to make congregational prayer feasible, Smith said they transitioned to developing a prayer team. During each service, Smith explained that members of the prayer are available for individual prayer in the back of the auditorium. Also, Smith's church offers prayer meetings on Friday evenings that are devoted to training and growth. Each gathering covers a topic or form of prayer, including "prayer for prophetic insight, prayer for healing, prayers of praise, prayer of intercession." He said his congregation has shown "an openness to innovation and flexibility" in its pursuit of growing in prayer and helping others learn to pray.

Milton reflected on a season in which he was uniquely devoted to prayer. While he was in college, Milton spent hours praying in a small chapel on his secular university campus for his non-Christian friends to come to faith. For years, he felt like his prayers were unanswered. But after going into ministry and remaining in the college town, he began to sense God was telling him that he previously "was praying for the next generation." His own generation of friends, now in their late thirties and early forties, had not largely come to faith. But his prayers may have been answered in the teenagers and college students now coming to faith on the same campus.

Hamilton reflected on prayer as one of the key features of spiritual renewal. He said, "Prayer is itself a means through which God chooses to answer his people, meaning that if you don't ask for revival, he doesn't send revival." He believes prayer plays a role both in preceding revival and sustaining renewal in a Christian's life. Few things could be

more important, Hamilton said, than a historic faith combined with becoming a “prayerful congregation.” He felt this combination, of both truth and experience, was essential to biblical renewal.

Kramer was the only leader to suggest that praying for healing was important for a church seeking renewal. He believes in “making room for prayer for healing and opportunities for confession and prayer in corporate settings.” While it is not a common practice in Reformed churches today, he believes James 5:16-19, urging elders to pray for the sick in faith, still applies today. Kramer suggests that prayer for healing should be incorporated into Sunday gatherings were possible.

Murphy reflected on his church’s decline and growth following the Covid pandemic. Although they lost people in 2020 and 2021, they began to see new growth in 2022. But it wasn’t because of a new strategy or program. Murphy explained, “We were just prayerful, seeking the Lord.” The leaders increased their commitment to prayer, specifically intercession, praying for the church’s growth and for their non-Christian friends to visit.

Although it was a season of renewal in prayer, Murphy adds that he had already established his own “rhythms of prayer years and years ago.” His personal prayer life became more vibrant in this season of growth, but the foundation for it had already been established. He compared it to his relationship with his wife. Murphy explained that, at times, marriages go through more difficult seasons where communication is less natural. But in other times, marriages can experience great, intimate, and ongoing communication which strengthens the relationship. He believes his relationship with God was growing in a similar fashion. During this season of renewal, Murphy’s prayer life looked like “a text

thread that's just constantly going." He viewed prayer as "an ongoing conversation with the Lord" that kept him refreshed and engaged, much like regular communication with his spouse would. Murphy considers his prayer life now to be much stronger because of the season of renewal in 2022. "I think that's one of the blessings that the Lord has given me and I can't imagine my life without it... He's still blessing me through it."

### *Community*

When Murphy's church was experiencing a season of spiritual renewal in 2022, he saw a significant change in his congregation's community dynamics. He said, "Our [leadership] team had gotten really close through Covid. And then I think in real time, seeing the Lord bring new people in and having the opportunity to kind of reset some things like our community groups and our membership, you know we just kind of rewrote things." The challenge of decline became an opportunity for growth and renewal. Murphy added, "It all just went really well that year and it kind of brought us back from the dead and we just really felt that the Lord was drawing us back together as a community." He said the changes had a beautiful impact on the church and reinvigorated him in his role as pastor. He believes he'll always remember 2022 as the year that the church experienced renewal.

Smith emphasized the role of stability in building church community. He had been in his city for more about fifteen years at the time of the interview. He had served in two churches but maintained several relationships across both tenures. Smith reflected on his relationships and stated that "I think just sticking with it is important." While modern culture can promote a type of upward mobility that assumes moving every few years, he found something different in his churches. He found an "orientation that is toward staying

rather than an orientation toward assuming there's a greener pasture somewhere." While he said there were certainly good reasons for leaving a church, staying in one community over a longer period of time allows a greater sense of fellowship and connection.

"There's just something to be said for a bias toward staying where you are," Smith said.

Smith was also unique in prioritizing communion in the church's regular practice of unity and fellowship. He acknowledged that many churches take communion only monthly or quarterly, but he offered simple advice for congregations wanting deeper relationships. He would "just encourage people to take communion every week." Why so? Smith reflected that the ordinary practice of communion "reminds us that we are there for communion with God and one another." Observing this ancient sacrament, he believed, helps church members remember that they are not watching a religious performance but actively participating in a shared spiritual experience. For all its members' differences and diversity, a church comes together around one table in a sense. This shared unity and oneness was important for Smith. Further, it instructs him that "taking communion reminds us that God is going to be together with us someday." Communion, for Smith, gives the church a shared purpose, a connection to a larger reality, and hope for a future together.

For Graham, the community dynamic of spiritual renewal is most visible in its willingness to confess sin to one another. He said, "I want churches that make it—not safe to sin—but safe to confess sin and deal with sin." He expounded, "The contexts in which my heart has been renewed is because I'm invited out of hiding and invited to understand my sin deeper, and that rich community has been so important for me." He gave the example of recovery support groups and retreats as having a unique opportunity

for this form of renewal in community. When men and women are vulnerable with their struggles and desiring to overcome addictions, he said, they are quicker to be honest with their needs. Graham had witnessed this acceptance in others and views recovery ministry as a model for the whole church to emulate. He said, “it’s pointing us to a deeper reality, that God loves us and receives us. And cultivating a community of renewal [requires] the confessing of sin in safety.” He suggested this type of ministry is unique but all leaders and ministries can learn from its effectiveness in promoting transformation and growth.

### *Mission*

Hamilton noted that much of the church’s mission today happens in the context of spiritual opposition. His explanation resembles Lovelace’s emphasis on spiritual warfare and the Christian’s authority in spiritual conflict. “You are in direct opposition regularly,” Hamilton suggested. The result is that a person will either become prayerful and seek God’s power or they will “fake it,” leading to unfruitfulness and burnout. He believes the combination of prayer and mission is designed to be mutually reinforcing.

Milton’s church partners heavily with a faith-based non-profit in his city. His desire is to “bring a kingdom culture and values” to one’s everyday life and work, from volunteering to social justice and local mission. Smith said his church also partners with local non-profit organizations, both faith-based and non-faith-based. He said he wants to see the church’s members serving the needs of the congregation and volunteering as a whole group from the church. But he emphasized the desire to equip members to also serve on personal levels with important causes and organizations.

Kramer thought of mission primarily in terms of sending Christian workers into the mission field. He believes the church has a responsibility to affirm Christian leaders



and support them in finding the appropriate destinations for them. He described a pathway of renewal-driven mission in sending missionaries. “This has been someone who’s responded to the gospel, who’s experiencing renewal... so we affirm that and then lay our hands on them and send them out to do that again in another place.”

Murphy saw his church increase its mission engagement during their season of renewal in 2022. He believes there’s an intimate connection between a person or congregation’s experience of “ongoing closeness with Christ” and their commitment to mission. Murphy viewed mission primarily in terms of engaging the neighborhoods directly surrounding his church facility. He has seen times where his congregation is “a little more inward focused” and times when it’s more outwardly engaged. He expects this as part of “the ebb and flow of a church.” But during the season of renewal in his community, the movement of spiritual life was both inward and outward. It was a time of refreshing for members, which led to a time of refreshing for their neighbors.

For Smith, mission is both local and global. He recommended identifying a place of mission where a church member can be involved on a daily or weekly basis. He quoted Abraham Kuyper’s phrase “every square inch” in referring to our opportunity and responsibility to bringing the good news into every location and aspect of society. Smith said he regularly asks his congregation the question: “What is the square inch that Christ is Lord over that he has placed you in?” Each member is expected to have a unique and different answer, and Smith believed that is ideal for church members’ sense of ownership. He suggested that teaching “good vocational discipleship” was among his most important concerns related to mission.

Mission also includes a global aspect for Smith. Like Kramer, Smith sees the church as bearing responsibility for reaching other nations and tribes with the message of the gospel. Smith said his sense of world mission is “shaped by the Great Commission,” referencing Jesus’s commandment to the disciples in Matthew 28:18-20. Mission should also be shaped, according to Smith, “by a biblical understanding of the nations of the world and our responsibility to go to them.” He described this understanding to be common in Western churches today, but there is often a lack of direction and structure for Christians to move into a mission field. Smith did not emphasize the local church’s role in sending missionaries to the extent that Kramer did, but he offered that new organizational and structural systems could ease participation in mission for his members.

### *Summary of Promoting Spiritual Renewal*

The second research question sought to determine how pastors and leaders promote spiritual renewal in their churches and ministries. The researcher asked three questions on the theme of promoting spiritual renewal. Participants were asked to describe how they promote renewal through prayer, through community, and through mission.

Each pastor or leader described prayer in terms of either or both private and congregational prayer. The leaders then offered how they promote spiritual renewal in and through the community dynamic of their church or organization. Lastly, respondents described how they understand and promote mission as a form of spiritual renewal. Interviewees’ responses were compared to and contrasted from one another.

## **Spiritual Renewal and Church Culture**

The third research question explored the role of congregational and organizational culture in promoting spiritual renewal in Reformed churches. The researcher was careful to understand how each participant described how spiritual renewal was integrated into their congregational or organizational culture.

The researcher also asked, “How has your preaching or teaching aimed to promote the spiritual renewal of your congregants?” The literature review in chapter two demonstrated that clear and repeated communication, in this case, preaching and teaching, are critical to building and sustaining congregational culture.

### *Understanding Church Culture*

Milton believes he is currently ministering in a season of spiritual renewal. He sees this mostly in his church community’s care for one another and in its healthy culture. Milton’s church was intentional in establishing a certain type of church culture from its inception about two decades ago. “You can go back to the founding documents,” he said. These documents were generally unchanged over more than twenty years of ministry. The church has had consistent senior leadership and operated in the same part of town. He added, “The principle and values they laid out, it came from Scripture and when properly applied, gave a vision for church life.” He believed the church had maintained its unique culture over these two decades. For his church, establishing shared values and doctrinal points of emphasis had the greatest influence on establishing and sustaining a unified culture.

Murphy gave the example of the role of worship in setting church culture. A church’s worship style is typically directed by its doctrinal views but also by what’s most

popular in other churches. Murphy expressed a distaste for contemporary Christian music and said he struggles with the worship in his own congregation. But the style of worship has become too deeply engrained in the church's culture, he believed, to make any significant change. He described resonating with other traditions' worship styles on a personal level. But since the church was more than a decade into their particular expression of worship, he felt that it would not be appropriate to try to shift the style.

Without using the exact language, Murphy expressed the difficulty of changing congregational culture without losing members of the organization to confusion and frustration. He was aware of the style of music's unspoken place in the church culture and felt it would be easier for the congregation to change ministers than change its music style.

### *Preaching and Spiritual Renewal*

Several of the participants described preaching as having a significant role in the shaping of a church's health and growth. Several emphasized the character of the preacher as well. They prioritized the pastor's vulnerability, honesty, and willingness to serve as an example to the church. Further, most understood preaching to be a primary means for communicating and building church culture.

Hamilton described preaching in the church as "necessary but not sufficient." He said that it is necessary to establish a biblical and doctrinal vision for the church. But it is not sufficient to produce complete maturity in a congregation. Prayer, worship, the sacraments and other forms of ministry must be engaged. But when these other elements are in place, then preaching can thrive. "There's no spiritual renewal," he explained,

“unless it is submitted to the word.” He believes many attempts at spiritual renewal and revival today fail because they lack an emphasis on the preaching of the gospel.

Milton agreed. He believed the Sunday sermon should focus on the gospel. However, he believed the gospel is best presented in varied language and a range of stories, propositions, and questions. Often, he believed, his listeners would not immediately know they were hearing the gospel, but after months of this style of preaching, would have a deeper understanding of its truth. Milton also quoted Tim Keller’s statement that if one preaches as if non-Christians are present, they eventually will be.

Kramer suggested that storytelling plays a unique role in preaching for renewal. “Jesus told stories,” he stated, “and I think there’s a way of telling the story of what God has done that helps draw others into participating in that story and experiencing his present work in their own life.” He suggests the standard model of preaching three-point sermons may not be as effective in modern culture. Nonetheless, Kramer said sermons should regularly be presenting the gospel and calling for response, urging non-Christians to turn to faith. Storytelling in the model of Jesus, he believes, is a strategic means to both reach non-churchgoers and equip current members.

Murphy also said preaching is indispensable in the cultivating of spiritual renewal. Like others, he wants the gospel to be the central message of his preaching. But he added, “I want it to be experienced with dirt under the fingernails.” He explained, “When I think of preaching being something that’s renewing for people, to me, it has to be making a lot of Jesus, but at the same time, it has to be the preacher [showing] his hands in the dirt all week, wrestling with Jesus, battling through the things you all are

battling through.” The preacher’s own personal character and authenticity was just as important as his content for Murphy. He expressed that if congregants do not sense their pastor is living the message of his sermons, the message will not have an impression.

Murphy also pointed to “conversational preaching” as vital to the pastor’s ability to connect with people in the 21st Century. He prefers “preaching that’s simple enough for a five year old to grasp it, [while] at the same time not watering it down. Just sort of exposing those massively beautiful truths.” Like Kramer, Murphy believes that telling stories is an effective means of following a biblical model of teaching while also connecting with the unique needs and preferences of contemporary culture. Preaching that’s too formal, for Murphy, will be less likely to spur renewal in the listeners. It’s too unfamiliar, he suggested, and it is not what modern church visitors are seeking.

Nonetheless, Murphy stated that pastors must be true to their background and style and not try to emulate a famous preacher. Authenticity in preaching came up for Murphy at several points. When pastors are preaching from their hearts and presenting the truth in a compelling manner, Murphy said, “that’s where the real renewal happens.” In his own teaching, Murphy says he wants to combine these elements: the gospel, daily life challenges and activities, and his own journey of faith. He concluded, “I just want preaching to be down in the dirt, I guess, is the best way I can say it.”

Smith also described the importance of honesty in preaching. But for Smith, this honesty was not only about the preacher’s truthfulness. The most effective preaching, according to Smith, involves “challenging you to be really honest about your heart.” He observed that much preaching in his tradition is focused primarily on intellectual comprehension. He prefers a method of preaching that engages deeper levels of

engagement. Smith stated that preaching for spiritual renewal would have to include “looking at the sermon in terms of the emotional impact that it has.” This is more than just encouraging congregants to feel better or experience a range of emotions. Smith believed that the sermon can identify the motives and struggles of listeners’ hearts in a way that encourages them to change, grow, and find hope in Jesus. He suggests that most people are aware of their needs but have not yet learned to bring their needs to Jesus. So, for him, preaching is an opportunity “bring the kingdom” to bear on the everyday lives of his parishioners.

Like Smith, Graham said that “authentic preaching” is essential for cultivating members’ spiritual renewal. He said the sermon cannot only be “an instructional” but should also be “a detailed painting.” While giving instructions for living is important, Graham explained, a sermon that metaphorically paints a picture for the congregation helps them understand the message and how to apply it to their lives. He suggested the use of stories, like Murphy and Kramer, but also highlighted preachers’ ability to illustrate points from their own lives.

For Graham, expository sermons, the style of message that teaches through a particular passage of the Bible week after week, are preferable. He stated that Christians will not be able to grow mature without being able to “understand the meaning of a text and the storyline of Scripture.” He offered that this can be highly intellectual, but he prefers a method that includes “thoughtful and accurate applications related to sin, the patterns of our hearts, and how the gospel satisfies our hearts.” Like several others, he stated that the gospel message should be present in every, or nearly every, sermon.

### *Summary of Spiritual Renewal and Church Culture*

The third research question explored the role of congregational and organizational culture in promoting spiritual renewal in Reformed churches. The researcher did not specifically ask about congregational culture. But rather, the researcher was careful to understand how each participant described how spiritual renewal was integrated into their congregational or organizational culture.

The researcher also asked, “How has your preaching or teaching aimed to promote the spiritual renewal of your congregants?” Each pastor or leader described their understanding of the role of preaching in spiritual renewal. Interviewees’ responses were compared to and contrasted from each other’s. The goal of this section was to better understand how Reformed leaders affect the culture of their churches and organizations and how utilize preaching to promote spiritual renewal within that culture.

### **Richard Lovelace and Spiritual Renewal Theories**

The final research question sought to determine how participants’ theology and theories of spiritual renewal compare to Richard Lovelace. First, the researcher asked the question, “How do you describe the role of the Holy Spirit in your church’s renewal?” The researcher listened to how each participant described their functional theology of the Holy Spirit in their church’s spiritual renewal.

Second, the researcher listened throughout the interviews to discern key themes from Lovelace’s dynamics of spiritual renewal in the participants’ answers. The participants’ descriptions of spiritual renewal are compared to the theories of Lovelace in this section.



## *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Renewal*

Kramer emphatically stated that the Holy Spirit is essentially to all of life in Christ. He referenced Galatians 3:1, where Paul asks rhetorically if the new believers “began by the Spirit” but were continuing in spiritual life by the law. Kramer suggested this strong rebuke could be for the church today if we are not recognizing the role of the Spirit in regeneration and renewal. “All life is dependence on God... The mission moves forward when we depend on the Spirit and ask for his help and [wait] on him. The Spirit is where the power is.” Later, he expressed that a lack of emphasis on the Holy Spirit could mean a decrease in humility for the Christian leader. “Lean on the Lord,” Kramer encouraged, “and lean on his Spirit’s health.”

Milton reflected on a recent season of spiritual renewal in his ministry and admitted it wasn’t preceded by unique teaching or strategy or preparation. “Really all I can do is look at it and say, ‘God’s Spirit did something.’” He suggested the younger generation, especially college students, in his city have developed a spiritual hunger. Where older generations, such as boomers, are interested in programs and a professional environment, the younger generation, including Gen Z, is interested in spiritual experience and genuine religious participation.

Milton believed that too many churches become formulaic in their approach and ministry and that this pushes young people away. “The minute you start acting in a formulaic way you are already cutting out space, in my opinion, where the Holy Spirit can actually work.”

Hamilton agreed that the Holy Spirit plays an essential role in spiritual renewal. “He takes the truth of Scripture, he takes the finished work of Christ,” he explained, “and

he applies it.” Hamilton views many church traditions today lacking in a full understanding of the Spirit’s role in illuminating Scripture and focusing the church on Jesus.

Murphy admitted the difficulty of understanding and communicating the doctrine and roles of the Holy Spirit. “In some ways, it’s hard to articulate,” he expressed. “The Holy Spirit can be such a confusing topic.” He stated that the Spirit’s role is not nearly as familiar in his church’s understanding as the roles of the Father and the Son. But Murphy has attempted to increase his congregation’s understanding by teaching about the Spirit’s role in softening hearts and preparing people to respond to Jesus.

Murphy also described his church’s practice of praying specifically to the Holy Spirit. He portrayed praying to the Spirit as a key element of knowing him personally. We should bring “our neediness,” Murphy explained, to the Spirit in prayer. The Spirit, according to Murphy, is always working “in softening, in refreshing, in renewing our hearts because everything flows from the heart, and only the Holy Spirit can do that work.” Murphy was alone in describing the importance of praying to the Spirit and stated that the reason for the practice had to be continually discussed in his church.

Smith reflected on Jesus’s promise to give his Spirit to his followers. He believes this helps his church understand that the Spirit is present when members pray with each other. The Holy Spirit’s presence “gets lived out through those long-term relationships” within the church. Smith noted that church members often do not understand the work of the Spirit, they are often experiencing it. He explained that “the Spirit will probably use one of us to bring the truth to someone else in a mediated way.” When members are

encouraging and challenging one another, Smith explained, it is also the Spirit who is encouraging and challenging through human action.

Graham highlighted the role of the Spirit in sanctification and the assurance of salvation. Apart from a strong emphasis on the Spirit, he suggested, we will not have access to understanding the Bible and how to live in a way that pleases God. Further, he said, Christians may doubt their own salvation and become unnecessarily discouraged. He explained the pattern in his own life: “We’re God’s children. I often forget that. The Spirit exposes me to God’s love and reminds me of who I am in Christ.” Graham expressed this dynamic of heightened awareness to the gospel as occurring on both an individual and corporate level. On both levels, Graham said, “the Spirit’s role is often reminding us of the gospel.”

Murphy was one of three participants to directly mention the gifts of the Spirit. He understands that spiritual gifts are a complex and controversial topic in many Reformed churches. He suggested his congregation is “a very cessationist kind of culture,” meaning the spiritual gifts are typically believed to have ceased in the 1st Century. But by teaching on the Spirit and praying to the Spirit, Murphy believes his congregation has become more open to spiritual gifts while also acknowledging “there’s mysteries here.” While he hopes to find the proper, biblical balance, Murphy admits, “I don’t know how to find the balance” between a Reformed teaching and a charismatic teaching on spiritual gifts. Nonetheless, he expressed gratitude for the Spirit’s presence in his church and hoped to keep learning and growing in prayer and spiritual gifts.

Smith also mentioned spiritual gifts but focused on the less controversial gifts like serving, mercy, and teaching (Eph. 4:10-11). Smith suggested that there is an important

connection between “renewal and giftedness.” When Christians discover and begin to live in their spiritual gifts, he explained, they are more likely to experience renewal. For Smith, the Spirit’s role in renewal was not only visible in promoting sanctification but also in empowerment for service to the church.

Graham also mentioned spiritual gifts in the context of Romans 1:11, where Paul describes his desire “to impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be strengthened.” Graham suggested that Paul assumed that the Spirit would be working through his presence and ministry if he could visit the Romans in person. Paul’s expectation, according to Graham, was that the Spirit would have an immediate strengthening effect on the church in Rome. And Graham believes the church can seek the Spirit’s power and strength in the same way today.

### *Echoes of Lovelace’s Renewal Dynamics*

All six of the interviewees mentioned the gospel in their responses. For each leader, the gospel was a central element in the church’s teaching and an essential part of spiritual renewal. For Lovelace, the gospel is a primary element in spiritual renewal. He teases the message of the gospel out into four items, which he lists as four primary elements in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*: justification, sanctification, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and authority in spiritual conflict. While not every one of these key concepts were identified in the interviews, the leaders put the gospel message in their own words as they described its role in spiritual growth and renewal. The frequency of the leaders’ references to the gospel suggests that Lovelace’s emphasis on its importance in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* and *Renewal as a Way of Life* has likely influenced the Reformed church several decades later.

The leaders interviewed also revealed an understanding of what Lovelace deemed the secondary elements of spiritual renewal, including prayer, community, and mission. Each respondent gave an answer for how his church integrated the gospel into the practical life of their church.

For example, Milton's church, during the Covid pandemic, put out a twice-daily podcast for its members. Episodes were short, only five to ten minutes each, and presented a simple prayer for congregants to listen to and participate in. He believed this combination of doctrine, spiritual experience, and community had a significant impact on both individual and corporate spiritual renewal. He later added that church community played a vital role in his church's recovery after the Covid pandemic. "I think friendship is actually a really important component of renewal and revival." Milton's sense of individual and congregational spiritual renewal being irreducibly intertwined illustrate Lovelace's theories of corporate renewal.

To illustrate further, Smith described a commitment to prayer that is unique in American churches. Lovelace lamented a weakness of prayer in the American church, but Smith's church could be characterized by the "extraordinary prayer" that Lovelace hoped to find in congregations.

In summary, many of Lovelace's themes, especially the gospel and the elements of prayer, community, and mission were present in the leaders' descriptions of spiritual renewal.

### *The Absence of Lovelace's Renewal Dynamics*

Despite the prevalence of Lovelace's themes in the respondents' answers, several features were noticeably absent. In the areas of revival, the Holy Spirit, and spiritual warfare, less reflection was found in the leaders' responses.

Revival is a frequent theme in Lovelace's writings, especially *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. Kramer mentioned revival meetings in his experience of spiritual renewal, and Milton cited Ezra and Nehemiah as an example of "failed revival." But only Hamilton described revival in terms that resonate with Lovelace's theories. Hamilton suggested that all Christians and churches should be actively pursuing revival, since it is the corporate and magnified version of the ordinary form of renewal. But no other leader mentioned revival as a feature or a pursuit in their church or ministry.

While each leader provided a summary of the Holy Spirit's role in spiritual life in their own words, noticeable differences between their theology and practice of the Spirit and Lovelace's theories were noted. Positively, several leaders described the Spirit's work in illuminating Christ and convicting the Christian of sin. Further, several leaders described the role of spiritual gifts in the church. But the respondents lacked the clarity on the Holy Spirit that they displayed when they described the gospel. Further, unlike Lovelace, no pastors described the gift of the Holy Spirit as a primary element of the gospel message.

While Lovelace gave significant coverage to the topic of spiritual warfare in his books, only one leader mentioned it in their responses. Smith, whose church is active in teaching methods and models of prayer, described an openness to talking about spiritual opposition in his context. He said one of his fellow leaders had talked openly about the

spiritual opposition he faced while starting the church. Smith also said their Friday night prayer sessions included training in praying against spiritual opposition and seeking to apply Christ's victory. This is the theme of chapter six in Lovelace's *Renewal as a Way of Life*. However, the other respondents did not mention spiritual warfare in their discussions of renewal.

### *Summary of Richard Lovelace and Spiritual Renewal Theories*

In summary, this section analyzed interview data and compared the respondents' expressions of spiritual renewal to Richard Lovelace's dynamics. The leaders described an importance of the gospel that accords tightly with Lovelace's theories. Each leader also reflected on the place of prayer, community, and mission in the church's pursuit of spiritual renewal.

However, Lovelace's expressions of revival, the Holy Spirit, and spiritual warfare were less present in the leaders' responses. Although each leader spoke to the role of the Holy Spirit in response to a specific question on the topic, less fluency was expressed. Further, only one respondent each reflected Lovelace's emphases on revival and spiritual warfare.

## **Summary of Findings**

This chapter examined the place of spiritual renewal in the lives of Christian leaders and their congregants. The researcher sought to understand how Reformed pastors and leaders think about spiritual renewal and what resources they utilize in their own ministries. Each interviewee was asked about how they promote spiritual renewal in their own context, specifically in the areas of prayer, community, and mission.

Each pastor or leader also spoke to the importance of preaching in church life and how to establish a congregational culture that accurately reflects the church's overall theology and practice. Lastly, the leaders were asked about the role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual renewal. The responses of the Reformed pastors and leaders were discussed and compared to the theories of Richard Lovelace.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges encountered by pastors and leaders in promoting spiritual renewal in their churches and organizations. In the introduction, the challenge of promoting spiritual renewal was discussed and the theories of Richard Lovelace were introduced.

In chapter two, the review of literature reflected contemporary research on Lovelace's dynamics of spiritual renewal, particularly in the areas of prayer, community, and mission. The literature review also discussed modern understandings of the apostle Paul's theology of spiritual life, especially exploring the gospel, spiritual life, regeneration, the Holy Spirit, resurrection, prayer, community, and mission. Finally, the literature review revealed leading theories on organizational and congregational culture, including how churches can promote their desired values, behaviors, and practices in congregational life.

In chapter three, the methods of qualitative research were detailed. The process and strengths of qualitative research were discussed. The researcher's position and the limitations of the study were acknowledged.

In chapter four, interview data from six pastors and leaders in the Reformed tradition was presented. In order to address the challenge of promoting spiritual renewal, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do Reformed pastors and leaders describe their theology of spiritual renewal?

2. How do Reformed pastors and leaders promote spiritual renewal among their congregants?
  - a. Through Prayer
  - b. Through Community
  - c. Through Mission
3. How do Reformed pastors and leaders integrate spiritual renewal into the culture of their congregation or organization?
4. In what ways and to what extent do Reformed pastors' promotion of spiritual renewal compare to Lovelace's theories?

Pastors and leaders were asked the same questions in order to understand where Richard Lovelace's theories have affected church life and culture. The researcher was careful to listen to common themes and values. The participants' responses also indicated where Lovelace's theories may have not fully entered the thoughts and theories of Reformed pastors.

In chapter five, the study will conclude with a final discussion of Lovelace's renewal dynamics, a summary of the findings, and recommendations for promoting spiritual renewal in churches in the future.

### **Summary of the Study and Findings**

This study reviewed relevant literature in three areas and analyzed interview data from six senior pastors.

The literature review has shown that Richard Lovelace presented a unified theory of spiritual renewal for Christian individuals and churches. His dynamics of spiritual change focus on inner and outer elements. The inner or primary dynamics focus on the

nature of the gospel, including justification, sanctification, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and spiritual victory. The victory of Christ over Satan, sin, and death means Christians have authority in spiritual conflict. The outer or secondary dynamics focus on prayer, community, mission, and theological integration. Lovelace's theology of renewal was also compared to the contributions of the modern spiritual formation movement.

The literature review covered two related areas of study to better understand the opportunities and challenges facing pastors and leaders. The apostle Paul's theology of spiritual growth was presented and discussed, with special emphasis on the gospel, regeneration, the resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, prayer, community, and mission. A review of organizational culture was also provided to better recognize the potential and difficulty of affecting change within a congregation or Christian organization.

The interviews revealed that Reformed pastors and leaders regularly think about promoting spiritual renewal in their own context. They are interested in cultivating their own spiritual life, and they are eager to promote the spiritual renewal of their congregants. Although Reformed leaders describe renewal, growth, and sanctification with different terms and nuances, there is a cohesive desire for the transformation of their congregants and churches.

## **Discussion of Findings**

In this section, the literature and interview research are compared in order to identify the opportunities and challenges pastors and leaders face in promoting a culture of spiritual renewal. This section will highlight areas of congruence between Lovelace's renewal dynamics, Paul's theology of spirituality, organizational culture, and the real world reflections of Reformed pastors and leaders.

Having reviewed these areas objectively, I will now discuss my interview data alongside the literature review to present my observations and perspectives on the findings. I will highlight where Lovelace's theology of renewal has been effective in influencing evangelical and Reformed church culture. I will also suggest where Lovelace's unique contributions have not been fully recognized and applied in these church circles. Finally, I will review the state of contemporary evangelical understanding and practice of spiritual formation and renewal and highlight areas for potential focus and growth.

Let's now consider where Lovelace's renewal dynamics have had the greatest influence on the church.

### *The Gospel and Gospel Centrality*

In his article, "3 Waves that Have Shaped Evangelical Christianity (And a 4th Wave on the Way)," Trevin Wax suggests the era of "gospel centrality" began in the mid 2000s and 2010s. Wax asserts that this movement was a response to "the overly pragmatic solutions and perceived a-theological deficiencies of the church growth and Spirit-filled movements."<sup>195</sup> But it is noteworthy to observe that Lovelace's emphasis on the gospel in spiritual growth and church life began with the publication of *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* in 1979. Since later pastors like Jack Miller and Tim Keller credited Lovelace with their understanding of the gospel and church, it is fair to assert that Lovelace held a central, if underrecognized, role in the spread of gospel centrality in the evangelical church.

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<sup>195</sup> Wax, "3 Waves that Have Shaped Evangelical Christianity (And a 4th Wave on the Way)."

My interviews with six Reformed leaders suggest that the gospel is being well cared for and protected in this growing tradition. Lovelace's fear that the average church member was not living in relationship to the gospel would likely be lower today than it was when he first wrote in 1979. Each of these six pastors and leaders could fluently describe the importance of the gospel to them personally. Further, each could reveal how the gospel was being taught, applied, and promoted within their own congregations, organizations, and ministries. Lovelace was likely quite pleased with the rise and flourishing of gospel centrality before his death.

Next, we will explore three areas where Lovelace's theology has had less of an impression on the modern church. First, I will assert that the contemporary church views spiritual renewal in primarily individualized terms, lacking Lovelace's vision for congregational renewal. Second, I will suggest that the modern spiritual formation movement lacks a cohesive theological center but can find it in Lovelace's decades-old theological vision for spiritual renewal. Third, I will suggest the evangelical and Reformed tradition has not fully appreciated Lovelace's emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in personal and congregational renewal.

Taken together, I believe that recovering Lovelace's contributions in these three areas will increase the evangelical and Reformed church's effectiveness in church life and mission.

### *A Vision for Spiritual Renewal Together*

As we saw in the introduction, Western culture is characterized by an unprecedented level of social isolation. American society has long been shaped by its ideals of freedom, personal autonomy, and individual flourishing. The dark side of this

appreciation for autonomy is a radical individualism that has hurt modern Americans in significant ways, as evidenced by the rates of loneliness today.

The church has not been unaffected by the rise in individualism, isolation, and loneliness. Although Christianity is a family of faith, rooted in shared belonging in the image of a triune God, the modern church has been less effective in shaping the minds of its congregants for life together. Loneliness has come to church, and divisions within congregations have become commonplace.

It is here that Lovelace's appreciation for the community dynamic of Christian faith can be useful. Lovelace refused to think of spiritual life and renewal in merely personal terms. The faith is deeply personal for Lovelace, but it is never privatized only. Personal and corporate renewal flow together, according to Lovelace, so when one is lacking the other will soon run dry as well.

I suggest that the modern Christian's personal renewal has been stunted by a lack of understanding the relational nature of the faith and the need for renewal alongside others. While many Christians are eager to grow spiritually, they may be preventing their own spiritual formation by unknowingly adopting a lifestyle of individualism and busyness that makes that formation nearly impossible. In order to be healthy, thriving Christians, individuals must be meaningfully connected to others in spiritual community. This community life cannot be superficial. To be powerful enough to shape the lives of its individuals, the community dynamic must involve a high degree of commitment and persistence in daily life and conflict.

Lovelace strongly asserts that most Christian congregations hold a silent agreement between their pastors and members. This paragraph could possibly be Lovelace's most famous sentiment.

Pastors gradually settle down and lose interest in being change agents in the church. An unconscious conspiracy arises between their flesh and that of their congregations. It becomes tacitly understood that the laity will give pastors special honor in the exercise of their gifts, if the pastors will agree to leave their congregations' pre-Christian lifestyles undisturbed and do not call for the mobilization of lay gifts for the work of the kingdom. Pastors are permitted to become ministerial superstars. Their pride is fed and their congregations are permitted to remain herds of sheep in which each has cheerfully turned to his own way.<sup>196</sup>

Jack Miller suggests that this compromise results in "the church of the religious cushion."<sup>197</sup> He suggests there is a conservative version of this agreement: Christians gather to hear the gospel preached without having a serious encounter with God himself. And there is a liberal version of it: Progressive Christians retaining their personal preference against God's holiness and justice and the reality of hell.

Kevin DeYoung, writing for The Gospel Coalition, also quotes Lovelace's famous paragraph and concludes that when pastors and churches make this silent agreement, "The body of Christ becomes less a living, growing, healthy organism and more of a coping club, a society of mutual reinforcement, nothing but a cushion against the pains of life."<sup>198</sup> DeYoung believes the antidote to this agreement is a willingness of both pastor and congregation to hear the gospel primarily in terms of dealing with our

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<sup>196</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, quoted in Kevin DeYoung, "Religious Cushioning," The Gospel Coalition (blog), January 4, 2010. Accessed November 1, 2024. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/religious-cushioning/>.

<sup>197</sup> Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, 26.

<sup>198</sup> DeYoung, "Religious Cushioning."

own sin. He suggests we must heed Lovelace's warning by rejecting people-pleasing and status quo seeking in the church and by embrace a dual awareness of our sin and a delight in Christ's work for our salvation.

In summary, Lovelace's spiritual dynamics provide a needed corrective to the modern church's comfortability with American individualism. Spiritual renewal is for individuals and communities, and no personal renewal will last without the support of a thriving biblical community. Lovelace embraced the true gospel and rejected an unbiblical compromise between pastor and congregation. The church that follows his vision for community life will be well positioned to experience continuous spiritual renewal.

### *Spiritual Formation and Theology*

In chapter two, we reflected on the growing movement of modern spiritual formation in the evangelical and Reformed church today. Wax's "3 Waves" article highlights this movement as a fourth wave that will have a greater influence on the future of the church. Of course, spiritual formation has a long history in the church, dating back to the church fathers. But the modern spiritual formation movement can be traced back to Richard Foster and Dallas Willard in the 1980's and 90's and can be witnessed as becoming mainstream in evangelicalism in the 2020's. We cannot know what Lovelace would have thought of this trend, but we can evaluate his writings to gain a sense for what he would have found most encouraging. We can also assess the spiritual formation movement and recognize where it lacks a cohesive theological center and how Lovelace's renewal dynamics could give the young movement more solid ground.



As we discussed in chapter two, Biola University's Kyle Strobel has written that if the church is to create "a distinctively Christian vision of spiritual formation," we also "need a spiritual *theology* that... casts a robust vision for life with God."<sup>199</sup> Strobel's concern likely would have resonated with Lovelace, who described the need for a unified field theory of spiritual theology and practice forty-five years ago. I share Strobel's concern that "practicing the way of Jesus" could overshadow the gospel in the central place of Christian life and experience. We can never replace God's free grace with a sense of earning God's favor through spiritual and religious practice, even ones designed to make us more Christlike. As Lovelace wrote, "Spiritual life flows out of union with Christ, not merely imitation of Christ... Redemption is participatory, not imitative."<sup>200</sup> Imitating Christ's way of life is not the basis for our salvation; the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in our place is redemption's sole foundation.

But as Lovelace well understood, the gospel is more than its simplest form. Jesus announced the gospel in terms of the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15), which certainly includes discipleship to him (Mark 1:16-20). Thus the first and lasting response to Jesus's invitation to life with God is to follow him and seek to become like him. This is why Lovelace highlights union with Christ and the participatory nature of redemption. To receive Jesus's message of salvation is to be joined to him, to abide in him, and to participate in life with him.

A second concern with the modern spiritual formation movement is that it can become privatized and severed from local church community. As we have just

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<sup>199</sup> Strobel, "The New (But Old) Wave in Evangelicalism."

<sup>200</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 101.

discovered, the church always becomes increasingly powerless when it loses its vital community dynamic. Lovelace understood this and kept an indissoluble connection between personal and corporate spiritual life.

In summary, I am grateful for the modern spiritual formation movement and its emphasis on participation in and imitation of the life of Jesus. But it will find deeper soil and more fruitful expression with a deep recognition of Lovelace's personal and congregational dynamics.

### *Life in the Spirit*

In this section, we'll explore the unique role of the Holy Spirit in Lovelace's theology and practice. How did Lovelace think about life in the Spirit? Why did he emphasize the Spirit's empowering presence to the degree that he did? What can the contemporary evangelical and Reformed tradition learn from his writings on the Spirit, spiritual gifts, spiritual warfare, and the pursuit of genuine revival?

On the role of the Holy Spirit in renewal, Lovelace wrote in a 1995 *Christianity Today* cover story, "Real Christianity requires encounter with truth, but that truth must be illuminated by the presence of the Holy Spirit."<sup>201</sup> True faith, for Lovelace, requires the presence of the Spirit, shining divine light on the truth of Scripture. Yet many Christians do not have this awareness of the Spirit's presence. In *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, Lovelace suggests, "Even where Christians know about the Holy Spirit doctrinally, they

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<sup>201</sup> Richard Lovelace, "The Surprising Works of God: Jonathan Edwards on Revival, Then and Now." *Christianity Today* Vol. 39, no. 10 (September 11, 1995), 28-34.

have not necessarily made a deliberate point of getting to know him personally.”<sup>202</sup> For Lovelace, the Spirit is a dynamic person of the Trinity that wants a personal relationship with God’s children and desires to fill them with his empowering presence.

On the place of spiritual gifts in the life of a church, Lovelace held a charismatic view of the continuation of all gifts in the present age. His tenure at Gordon-Conwell coincided with the rise of the third-wave charismatic movement, which can be traced back to the Jesus Movement of the 1960s and the rise of the Vineyard Fellowship, Calvary Chapel, and Hope Chapel movements in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>203</sup> The charismatic movement remained both popular and controversial through Lovelace’s life and writing career. He included a discussion of spiritual gifts in his 1979 publication of *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. He wrote, “It would be theologically and practically convenient for the church not to have to make room for current manifestations like [spiritual gifts], but the plain import of the New Testament gives no hint that they are limited to the first century... There is a vigorous faith in the supernatural operation of God in many charismatic circles which the rest of the church should emulate.”<sup>204</sup> Lovelace was assertive in promoting the cultivation and proper use of spiritual gifts in the modern church.

During the rise of the Vineyard church movement and “Toronto Blessing,” a charismatic outpouring at a Toronto congregation, Lovelace reflected on the third-wave charismatic movement. It “has retained Pentecostal gifts but has recentered the

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<sup>202</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 130.

<sup>203</sup> Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 1997.

<sup>204</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 126.

charismatic movement on spiritual warfare and healing, decreasing the emphasis on tongues and accepting a broader range of gifts as signs of fullness of the Spirit. This may be a winning combination, to which God wants to draw attention.”<sup>205</sup> Lovelace’s views may have differed from the traditional views of Gordon-Conwell and the Reformed tradition in general, but he provides sound biblical basis for them and demonstrated a generosity toward churches worshipping God in original forms.

On spiritual warfare, Lovelace wrote, “While the New Testament states unequivocally that Christ totally defeated the powers of darkness in his atoning work, it also makes clear that the results of this victory still remain to be worked out through the increasing liberation of the earth from the occupying army of hostile spirits.”<sup>206</sup> He believed that evangelicals were unwise to ignore the realities of Satan and spiritual warfare, especially considering the certainty of Christ’s victory over sin and death described in the New Testament. Lovelace devoted multiple chapters to the topic of spiritual warfare, and the modern church would be wise to recover his balanced teachings on the topic.

Lastly, revival was of particular interest to Lovelace the historian. It was the topic of his Ph.D. dissertation at Yale University and remained a feature of his writing throughout this life. For this reason, he became a leading evangelical voice in assessing fast-growing spiritual movements in the 1980s and 90s. In his 1995 *Christianity Today* article, Lovelace reflected on encouraging signs of renewal and revival in North America.

Tens of thousands of men attend rallies and rededicate their lives to Christ and recommit to their marriages. Students in Christian colleges line up to

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<sup>205</sup> Lovelace, “The Surprising Works of God.”

<sup>206</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 136.

testify and confess their sins. In Toronto, a congregation nestled among airport hotels becomes a jet-age version of the frontier camp meetings, drawing its attendance not just from the next county, but from other continents. Are events like these the overture to another great awakening—or even just a small one?<sup>207</sup>

In evaluating modern revival stories, Lovelace looked to history for solid grounding. Specifically, Jonathan Edwards and his 1741 sermon, “Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God,” gave Lovelace his overall framework for revival.<sup>208</sup> Edwards and Lovelace both were non-sensational scholars, committed to testing every claim of revival against a consistent biblical and theological framework.

But Lovelace wasn’t only a historian, and he certainly wasn’t a cynic. He promoted praying for true revival and longed to see it come in his lifetime. Like Edwards, Lovelace sought to subject modern revivals “to the most rigorous critique” while also aiming “to solicit extraordinary prayer for [revival’s] advancement” as “the strategies we need to follow today.”<sup>209</sup> The contemporary church would do well to more deeply understand the place of renewal and revival in church history and to seek it more fervently.

In summary, I believe Lovelace’s unique emphasis on life in the Spirit, including spiritual gifts, spiritual warfare, and revival, are needed in the evangelical and Reformed church today. Embracing the Spirit’s empowering presence, while maintaining Lovelace’s concern for the gospel, the Scriptures, and the local church, will likely prove devotionally and missiologically powerful in the modern era.

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<sup>207</sup> Lovelace, “The Surprising Works of God.”

<sup>208</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God” (1741), quoted in Lovelace, “The Surprising Works of God.”

<sup>209</sup> Lovelace, “The Surprising Works of God.”

## *Summary of Discussion of Findings*

My perspective is that Lovelace's spiritual renewal dynamics are still needed today. In important ways, his theological vision is even more timely and needed in our own day.

It seems, in the most general way, that Lovelace's two great concerns could be described in terms of gospel and presence. The gospel is the message and power of God to transform individuals from the domain of darkness into light. It is the good news that Jesus is now welcoming sinners into his kingdom. Indeed, the gospel invites us into God's presence. Jesus's life, death, and resurrection gives us access to God.

In Lovelace's writings, the gospel is central and yet it is also for life in the presence of God. Life in God's presence means Christians are welcomed into a life of worship, prayer, community, and mission. Lovelace's unified theory of spiritual renewal integrates these two grand themes of gospel and presence.

In a podcast for The Gospel Coalition, Ray Ortlund Jr. articulated a similar need. He reflected on growing up in the Jesus Movement of the 1960s and later joining the Reformed, gospel-centered tradition. He said:

I don't think that we generally—we Gospel [centered] types—we have not experienced a corresponding resurgence of relational beauty... We've all been so enriched and strengthened and helped, and the truth of the gospel has been clarified for us all. But we have not had the same resurgence of relational beauty. I don't know anybody that's downright mean. But... we need to—very carefully, reverently, joyously— attend to, cultivate, and build the intangibles of the relational beauties that the gospel itself calls for and creates.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Ray Ortlund Jr., "Episode One," *You're Not Crazy: Gospel Sanity for Young Pastors* podcast, The Gospel Coalition (Season 1).

In other words, one can believe in the gospel, hold to solid theology, and enjoy well-ordered churches and yet barely experience the presence and relational beauty of Christ. Lovelace rejected this division of gospel and presence and likely would have agreed with Ortlund's desire for cultivating the relational presence of God that the gospel itself opens.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

In light of the findings described above, the church is well advised to consider the writings of Lovelace and the examples of the pastors and leaders in chapter two.

Contemporary church practice could become more grounded in a comprehensive theory of spiritual renewal. Practice could focus more intently on the gospel, prayer, community, mission, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the hope of revival.

As we have seen, gospel centrality has grown in the church since Lovelace's original work. But any doctrine that becomes assumed is at risk of being lost. Younger pastors and leaders may not see the need for clarifying and contending for the gospel in their own ministries. But without keeping the gospel central, subsequent generations may not develop their own convictions around the core message of Christianity and so become focused on secondary matters.

An emphasis in prayer is sorely needed in today's congregations. Although each of the six leaders interviewed expressed a desire to pray deeply and lead their churches in prayer, only one described their church as being an actively praying congregation. Pastors and leaders today could give increased attention to their own prayer lives and to developing a culture of prayer in their own churches. Resources for becoming more prayerful churches would be welcome.

Lovelace lamented the lack of community in many churches and yet was encouraged by the growing trend of small groups in the contemporary church. Pastors and leaders would be wise to adopt a similar conviction around the relational nature of the faith. Deeper resources for churches to thrive in their community dynamic would be appreciated.

Churches that lack a sense of mission are likely to err in one way or another. Lovelace sensed that mission is a needed element of spiritual renewal. The church that becomes ingrown or ineffective in mission is likely to hamper its own spiritual formation and church life. Pastors and leaders should prayerfully discern how to engage the non-Christians in their neighborhoods and cities as well as how to send their congregants into less-reached areas for outreach.

The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in spiritual renewal, according to Lovelace. It seems prudent for churches and leaders to not only be open to the Spirit's work but to welcome and pursue it. Increased teaching on the person and work of the Spirit, the role of the Spirit in salvation, spiritual gifts, and spiritual warfare are needed to give the church its full New Testament power.

Lastly, Lovelace was a student of revival histories and prayed to see a fresh awakening of the gospel and God's presence in his own age. He knew revival couldn't be manufactured. But he also knew that the churches that were most active in seeking God's presence while grounded in God's word were the ones that were most likely to see "a surprising work of God."



## **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges facing pastors and ministry leaders in promoting spiritual renewal in their churches and ministries. Attention has been given to Richard Lovelace's dynamics of spiritual renewal, Paul's theology of Christian spirituality, and church culture.

As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the research can be. This study has barely covered many topics that could have been further examined, including union with Christ, worship, sin, social engagement, and church planting. Nonetheless, this study attempted to focus on Lovelace's key themes and his relevance for the Reformed community today.

Therefore, pursuit of the several areas of study could be highly valuable for evangelical and Reformed churches today. First, an exploration of gospel and presence would be welcome. While the evangelical community has published many important works clarifying the need for gospel centrality, the theme of God's presence has received less scholarly and popular attention. Increased reflection on the various aspects of God's presence would be appreciated. And a thoughtful study of the connection between the gospel and God's presence would have a lasting benefit for the church.

Second, a deep study by scholars within the Reformed community on the topics of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, spiritual warfare, and revival would be welcome. These topics are often covered by scholars and leaders within charismatic and Pentecostal traditions, but there is no less need for distinctly Reformed study in these areas as well. Lovelace's capacity to read across theological traditions and to generously engage scholars in other tribes would be a helpful model for this type of study and engagement.

Third, I suggest that the creation of a Richard Lovelace Center for Spiritual Renewal would be a meaningful contribution to the evangelical church world. In his own lifetime, Lovelace and several colleagues founded the Foundation for Church Renewal, which aimed to promote spiritual renewal in churches around the world. It is unclear how developed the Foundation became and how long it lasted. But Lovelace's proposals in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* and *Renewal as a Way of Life* could be further developed through a center devoted to promoting his thought and legacy. The center could also provide field training for pastors, leaders, and mission workers in the most effective means of spiritual renewal.

In summary, there are multiple opportunities for research and ministry practice that would promote spiritual renewal in individuals and communities for years to come. May the Lord grant his favor on these endeavors.

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