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A STRATEGY TO INTRODUCE AND ENCOURAGE TRANSFORMATIONAL
BIBLE READING AT HORIZON COMMUNITY CHURCH

Written by

JOHN TROTTER

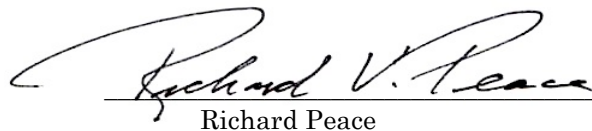
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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:


Richard Peace


Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: February 5, 2013

A STRATEGY TO INTRODUCE AND ENCOURAGE TRANSFORMATIONAL
BIBLE READING AT HORIZON COMMUNITY CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JOHN TROTTER
JANUARY 2013

ABSTRACT

A Strategy to Introduce and Encourage Transformational Bible Reading at Horizon Community Church

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Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2012

The purpose of this ministry focus paper is to present a strategy to introduce and encourage the congregation at Horizon Community Church to approach Bible reading with a goal and expectation of personal transformation by providing training and tools that will facilitate this approach to Scripture. This paper examines the particular context of Horizon Community Church and the broader context of the American evangelical church. It provides an overview of the church's history, demographics and the current local church culture. It will be asserted that changes within the broader evangelical cultural since the 1960s are conducive to the introduction of transformational Bible reading.

The role of the Bible in spiritual transformation will be examined. This will include exploring the nature, authority, power and purpose of Scripture. It is asserted that the essential nature of spiritual transformation is that it is necessary, progressive, holistic, and originated by God. The Bible works in conjunction with other change agents and transformational Bible reading works in relationship with other spiritual disciplines. The design of the project considers ancient methods and current evangelical thought in determining that *lectio divina* is the best model for transformational Bible reading. It is argued that oral nature of ancient reading was an important component and that modern technology can facilitate a return to that practice.

An introductory study based on the elements of spiritual transformation and *lectio divina* was designed and presented to the church. An evaluation of the study indicated that the concept of transformational Bible reading was well received. Based on the experience, this paper concludes that the concept and practice can be successfully introduced to an evangelical congregation and it is expected that over time the value will be evident. There must be both ongoing emphasis and teaching to maintain the initial success.

Content Reader: Richard Peace, PhD

Words: 298

To Dianne, who encouraged me as she waited
for almost forty years for this to be done.

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I would like to thank Horizon Community Church for their support and patience during the time I have worked on this project. Thank you to the elders and staff who have endured my absence, especially at the end of the process. Thank you to Anne, Tami, and my wife Dianne, who spent hours proof-reading. I could not have done this without you. Finally, thank you to the members of my Fuller cohort, both instructors and fellow students, for your friendship and contribution to my theological development.

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INTRODUCTION

Every Christian church desires that its constituents would grow into a mature faith. The question then becomes how to accomplish that task. The answer is guided by the definition of Christian maturity and by an assessment of the power of various agents needed to accomplish the needed change. Two basic propositions are foundational to a strategy to achieve that goal. The first is that achieving maturity, classically known as sanctification, is a process which begins at conversion and continues throughout the Christian life. Since Jesus is the ultimate example of sanctification, its prime definition is “to become conformed to the image of Christ” (Rom 8:29).¹ The second proposition is that the Bible, together with prayer, is an essential and powerful agent in the process.

My view of sanctification has changed through the years as I have been influenced by association, study, personal experience, and hopefully the Holy Spirit.² I experienced a crisis conversion at the age of eighteen in a small-town Southern Baptist church in Alabama.³ The predominant sentiment was that if an individual was “saved” that person would fully act in a manner consistent with a lifestyle expected of a Christian in that rural Alabama culture. Transformation was an assumed by-product of conversion. The overwhelmingly predominant message of the proclamation was that everyone needed

¹ All Scripture quoted is from the New American Standard Bible (1995 Update), unless otherwise noted.

² From this point on, I will generally use the term “spiritual formation” or “transformation” rather than sanctification. It is to be understood that “conformity to Christ” as sanctification is the end result of that transformation.

³By crisis conversion, I mean an identifiable point at which one makes the willful decision to become a follower of Christ. Generally, this means to acknowledge the divinity of Christ, the lordship of Christ, and the need for salvation. It includes a confession of repentance of sins. Conversion also can be used as a term to refer to life-long process of transformation but it will be used in the limited sense here.

to experience a crisis conversion at which time Christ was invited into one's life through prayer, and thus the person became a Christian. There was little mention of any process of growth after that event. In fact, many church members had multiple crisis conversion experiences since they were taught that if their lives did not live up to the expected standard of Christian living, they must not have been truly converted. A second influence came during my college experience from the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. They added a second step, beyond initial crisis conversion, through their pamphlet "Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-Filled Life?"⁴ This added an additional step of growth along with some basic personal mentoring, but it still did not present maturation as a long-term process. Most of my initial spiritual growth came as a result of the intense atmosphere of my college relationships. During that time, nightly prayer meetings and Bible study were the standard practice at my college campus. There was no structure, other than that provided by my ministerial courses, but I saw those courses primarily as a way to add to my biblical knowledge and only secondarily to my spiritual growth.

Subsequently, influences including the charismatic movement and the covenant movement added to my body of knowledge and even to my personal growth.⁵ However,

⁴ William R. Bright, *Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-Filled Life?* (Sydney: Lay Institute for Evangelism, 1966).

⁵ The charismatic movement refers to the spread of the experience commonly known as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This experience accompanied by speaking in tongues moved beyond the Pentecostal denominations into other more mainline denominations beginning in the 1960s. The covenant movement was the preferred term for those within one branch of the charismatic movement. It has also been known as the shepherding movement or the shepherding/discipleship movement. The movement emphasized personal accountability to a pastor. Although it was controversial and considered negatively by some, my personal experience was predominantly positive. For a balanced history of the movement S. David Moore, *The Shepherding Movement: Controversy and Charismatic Ecclesiology*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003).

it was not until my current connection to Horizon Community Church that I increasingly began to see spiritual transformation as a life-long process. Participation in a North American Baptist leadership training program was significant in developing that insight. This program was based on materials formulated by Randy Reese in his doctoral dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminary.⁶

From the beginning, the Bible has been a central component of my spiritual journey. I always have had a high view of the importance of the Bible in Christian life. However, as my view of the nature of the process of spiritual formation has changed, a change in my understanding of the Bible's role in that development also has occurred. The Baptist and charismatic communities who have shaped my attitude toward Scripture both give primary value to the Bible as the standard for faith and practice. They also stress the importance of daily Bible reading and prayer. Repeatedly, I have heard and been taught that a daily "quiet time" of Bible reading and prayer is essential to spiritual health. While the value of this custom seems to be almost universally held across a wide spectrum of Christian faith traditions, my understanding of the nature and purpose of that practice has evolved. I no longer see Bible reading and prayer only as practices that define a person as a committed Christian. They also are not purely exercises that help a Christian meet the stresses and demands of daily living, nor are they solely to aid in the call to proclaim the gospel. Although each of these purposes is legitimate, they are only part of the overarching intention, which is to accomplish the process of transformation. The goal of spiritual formation must be the principle aim of the practice. Concurrently, it

⁶ Randy Reese, "A Philosophy of Education for Leadership Development through the Leadership Center Training Model" (DMiss thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2003).

must be recognized that the practices of Bible reading and prayer are essential to the process. Therefore, the original question of how to accomplish the task of aiding Christians in growth to maturity is refined for the purposes of this thesis to a question of how to increase the practices of Bible reading and prayer with a mindset that promotes spiritual formation. Thus, the purposeful practices of Bible reading and prayer come together to form what I will call “transformational Bible reading.”

In my current setting at Horizon, there is an understanding of spiritual formation as a process and not an expectation of instant transformation at the point of “new birth.” In fact, despite the church’s general teaching emphasizing crisis conversion, my observation is that the experience of most of the people in the congregation is more consistent with a model of gradual conversion. Although the idea of a specific point of “new birth” is consistent with Baptist doctrine, frequently, the gradual nature of the journey from unbelief to belief makes it impossible to identify the exact moment in time. Despite Horizon’s conservative Baptist theology, the casual and accepting nature of the church culture provides a comfortable setting for those who have come to a place of Christian faith through a gradual process rather than an overt crisis point of “new birth.” Therefore, while the understanding of the need for spiritual formation must continue to be reinforced and strengthened, it does not present the same difficulty as facilitating an actual increase in the practices of Bible reading and prayer.

Despite the almost universal acceptance and teaching of the need for daily Bible reading and prayer, there is a disconnection between the truth that is taught and the actual practice for most people, including myself. The first cause of this disconnection lies within the culture of my faith tradition. While the practical use of the Bible is consistently

taught, the passion for this exercise pales in comparison to the fervor that arises when teaching and defending the dogma of divine inspiration and infallibility. Conservative Baptist evangelicals tend to be passionately defensive if someone disputes the infallibility of the Bible, but, on the other hand, frequently are passively accepting when someone simply does not use it. While dogma has importance, if the Church would be as passionate about how it approaches and uses the Bible as it is about mental assent to a doctrine, the inherent culture would be more supportive of a transformational approach to Bible reading. A significant part of the problem then is to change the cultural attitude, at least within the local church, towards the Bible.

In her modern day hymn, *Ancient Words*, Lynn DeShazo asserts the doctrine of the truth of the words of the Bible. However, she expresses poetically the needed alternative to an attitude that consists only of propositional truth:

Ancient words ever true
Changing me, changing you
We have come with open hearts
O let the ancient words impart

Holy words long preserved
For our walk in this world
They resound with God's own heart
O let the ancient words impart⁷

She affirms that the ancient words are still applicable in our modern and post-modern society. The emphasis, however, is not on doctrinal assent, but rather on the power of these ancient words to change us. Our part is to come to them with a heart that is open to change. Our prayer for heart change recognizes that the power of the Bible lies not in our

⁷ Lynn DeShazo, *Ancient Words: Ancient Words*, performed by Lynn DeShazo, Ready Writer Music RWMCD45, 2005, CD.

affirmation of the doctrine of infallibility but rather in the fact that they “resound with God’s own heart.”

The second cause for disconnection between the truth that is taught and the actual practice is the difficulty of maintaining a consistent time of prayer and Bible reading. Factors that contribute to this difficulty include the degree of personal desire and commitment, external pressures of life that work against self-discipline, and lack of training in practical techniques that assist in the exercise of the activity. Historically there has been a lack of tools provided to help with these difficulties. For the most part, believers were just told to do it. They were expected to read the Bible and to pray. There was little, if any, guidance. Within the charismatic movement, there were a few early helps such as Larry Lea’s *Could You Not Tarry One Hour?*, but little else.⁸ Until about ten years ago, I was personally unaware of the writings of Richard Foster and Dallas Willard.⁹ Those with whom I was associated certainly would have been skeptical of anything connected with Catholicism or to some extent even with mainline Protestant denominations. As such, we were not privy to the wealth of prayer tools available within those traditions. Any attempt to resolve the disconnection between belief and practice must address attitudes about the Bible and prayer while providing assistance in overcoming the difficulties of maintaining a consistent practice.

The end purpose of this project is to present a biblically based, contemporary, and relevant strategy which will introduce, encourage, and enable the congregation at

⁸ Larry Lea and Church on the Rock, *Could You Not Tarry One Hour?* (Rockwall, TX: Church on the Rock, 1986).

⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008); Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

Horizon to integrate Bible reading with prayer in order to progress in personal transformation towards conformity to Christ. Part One will examine the general problem stated above, specifically in the context of Horizon. It will provide an overview of the church's history and demographics, and also analyze the current church culture as it relates to the issue of spiritual growth, with an emphasis on Bible reading integrated with prayer. It also will examine the changing landscape of the evangelical church in conjunction with events in the Church as a whole which influenced that change. The assessment of the broad context of the evangelical church will include personal references where I participated in such events, as they have influenced my teaching at Horizon. Finally, the context of barriers to increasing participation in this transformational process will be considered.

Part Two will examine the nature and purpose of Scripture in transformation and identify principles to use in developing a strategy and methodology of reading the Bible. This will explore the nature of the Bible in terms of its reliability, authority, and power. It also will seek to define clearly the purpose of the Bible. The essential principles of spiritual transformation will be established, followed by an examination of ancient methods of Bible reading and prayer in relation to modern evangelical culture.

Part Three will describe a strategy to introduce transformational Bible reading to Horizon. The strategy will begin by developing basic training for those who will be teaching and leading small groups within the church. The greatest emphasis will be given to the implementation of an initial introductory thrust which will include a sermon series and small-group study. The study will include teaching on the need for transformational Bible reading, and also provide practical exercises and instruction on that practice, with

an emphasis on integration with the discipline of prayer. The goal is to present these concepts and practices in language and methodology, including modern technology, which will be understandable and well received by a predominantly conservative evangelical congregation. After the content of the study has been presented, the conclusion will evaluate of the initial presentation and propose steps for development of a broad plan to implement and reinforce transformational Bible reading throughout the church structure.

PART ONE

CONTEXT AND PRESENTING ISSUES

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND SETTING

A strategy to introduce transformational Bible reading to a local church requires an understanding of the context in which it is set. For this project, that will mean the local context of Horizon. Therefore, the beginning point of the strategy is a study of the history of the church and its locale and demographics. The next step will be to assess the church culture and values and then look at both current and historical practices used by the church to promote spiritual growth. Finally, consideration will be given to conditions in the local church culture which are barriers in promoting transformational Bible reading.

History of Horizon Community Church

Horizon began in September 1994 as a church plant of the North American Baptist Conference through the Northern California Association.¹ The North American Baptist Conference (NAB) is a relatively small denomination of approximately four hundred churches which are located, in relatively equal numbers, in Canada and the

¹ Multiple conversations with Steve Lemke, founding pastor, 1994–1995; Multiple conversations with Tim Stevenson, current pastor, and other leaders in the church, 1999–2012.

United States.² The Northern California Association is one of thirteen regions which combine to make up the denomination.

The denomination has strong German roots, and its theology and practices are consistent with general conservative evangelical Protestant standards. It does, however, have significant diversity, making strong efforts in recent years to form relationships with ethnic churches, especially in California.³ The majority of these churches have been of either Hispanic or Eastern European origin. The Northern California Association has been a leader in this area as well as in the planting of new churches. Due to of the strength of this association, the denomination has recently moved its headquarters to the Sacramento area.⁴ The corridor from Sacramento to the Stockton area forms one of NAB's strongest regions. The Northern California Association was instrumental in the planting of Horizon, providing planning, oversight, and initial funding for the church.

At the time the church began, it used a seeker-sensitive model as demonstrated by Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois.⁵ Originally, Sunday morning services were geared almost completely toward the people who did not normally attend church. Participatory worship was kept to a minimum, and the service was

² "About Us," North American Baptist Conference, <http://www.nabconference.org/about-us> (accessed June 27, 2012).

³ "Northern California Churches," NAB California Association, <http://nabcalifornia.org/nalchurches> (accessed November 16, 2012).

⁴ Rob McClellan, "North American Baptist Conference Weekly Update, October 24, 2011," North American Baptist Conference, <http://www.nabconference.org/news/north-american-baptist-conference-weekly-update-october-24-2011> (accessed June 27, 2012).

⁵ For a description and analysis of this model published close to the time Horizon began see G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1996).

designed to communicate the message of the gospel with a strong emphasis on personal needs as perceived by the attendees. Programs for children were a priority from the beginning, and separate activities were provided for them during the Sunday service. Adult growth activities were done in small groups during the week.

In late 1995, although the church already had grown to an average Sunday attendance of 150 people, the founding pastor was asked to resign due to leadership issues.⁶ In March 1996, the church called the current senior pastor, and, under his influence, it gradually began to move away from the Willow Creek model. Under the new pastor's leadership, the church continued consistent growth. By 1999, it convened two services each Sunday morning, and had reached an average attendance of over 350 people.⁷ That year, the senior pastor initiated a merger with a much smaller non-denominational charismatic church which I pastored. The merger was used as a vehicle to change the name from Horizon Baptist Church to Horizon Community Church. This recognized a negative perception of Baptists outside of the church and the low priority of denominational adherence by those within the church.

Although twenty-five acres of freeway frontage property had been purchased by 1997, the lack of infrastructure at the location made building costs prohibitive. Therefore, the church met in a local community center and a Boys and Girls Club facility until 2003. In late 2002, a mold problem was discovered in the Boys and Girls Club building. The building had to be closed and the need to find a permanent location became more urgent. Fortunately, a building, which had originally been constructed as a bowling alley, and

⁶ John Trotter, "Horizon Community Church — Attendance 1995–2001" (Report presented at the monthly elder meeting at Horizon Community Church, Galt, CA, January 10, 2002).

⁷ Ibid.

which was currently being used as a bingo hall, was available for sale at an affordable price. After six months spent remodeling the facility, the church began operating in its first full-time facility in September 2003. This followed an almost nine month period during which parents had to drop off their children at multiple locations and then drive to the community center for the adult services. Since this is not a situation conducive to attracting families with young children, the church leadership considers the increasing attendance numbers during that period to border on miraculous. In September 2004, the tenth anniversary of the founding of the church was celebrated, and a third Sunday morning service was added. Eventually the church staff came to be composed of five full-time employees and five part-time employees, including pastors and support staff.

Records show that the church experienced a consistent increase in attendance averaging 10 percent for each year of its existence up until 2008. That year, it reached a peak average attendance for the year of 845 people.⁸ However, in the past several years attendance has declined by approximately 5 percent each year. The church has been unable to precisely pinpoint the primary cause for the decline. Some members have transferred to one of the two new contemporary churches which have opened in the city since 2008 and have a similar style to Horizon. A decline in the population of Galt is also a factor. While clear census comparison data is not available for that period, the population decline is demonstrated in the Galt city kindergarten through eighth grade schools, where enrollment has declined by 10 percent since 2008.⁹

⁸ John Trotter, "Horizon Community Church — Attendance 2006-2012" (Report presented at the monthly elder meeting at Horizon Community Church, Galt, CA, August 9, 2012).

⁹ Galt Joint Union Elementary School District, *Period 2 Actual Daily Attendance Report, Years 2008 to 2011*, 2-3.

Locale and Demographics

In order to completely understand the setting of Horizon, it is important to look at the larger situation in which it operates. The nature and demographics of the city and the surrounding areas in which it is located will have an impact upon the functioning of the church. It is also necessary to consider the demographics within the church itself, including ethnicity, age, and religious background.

City of Galt, California

Horizon is located in the city of Galt, California on U.S. Highway 99 halfway between Sacramento and Stockton, approximately twenty miles from each. Galt was a small dairy farming town with a population of 5,575 in 1980 when it began to experience rapid growth along with the adjoining areas. It now has increased to a population of over 24,000.¹⁰ Lodi, which is ten miles to the south, has pursued a slow growth policy and has grown about 20 percent to over 60,000.¹¹ Elk Grove, ten miles to the north, has allowed rapid expansion and has grown to over 150,000 although it was an unincorporated area until only a few years ago.¹²

The agricultural influence remains strong in Galt even though its role has diminished greatly. The California Future Farmers of America recently relocated its headquarters to Galt, partially due to the strong agricultural program at Galt High

¹⁰ City of Galt, California, "Housing Needs Assessment," <http://www.ci.galt.ca.us/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=634> (accessed August 31, 2012).

¹¹ City-Data.com, "Lodi, California," <http://www.city-data.com/city/Lodi-California.html> (accessed August 31, 2012).

¹² City-Data.com, "Elk Grove, California," <http://www.city-data.com/city/Elk-Grove-California.html> (accessed August 31, 2012).

School.¹³ The growth of the city has been primarily in residential housing along with some new retail growth but little attraction of new industry. The city remains a predominately agricultural, blue collar community. According to the city's web site, as of 2007, only 14.7 percent of the population age twenty-five or older had a bachelor's degree or higher, while less than 3 percent had a master's degree or higher.¹⁴ Both these figures are significantly lower than the California average. The composition of the population is predominantly non-Hispanic white, with Hispanics making up 39 percent of the population, while the representation of other racial groups is minimal.¹⁵

Horizon Demographics

The latest church survey shows some differences between the demographics at Horizon as compared to the Galt general population. The Horizon congregation is significantly more educated than Galt as a whole, with 25 percent of the adults holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Hispanics are greatly underrepresented at Horizon. Only 5 percent of the congregation classify themselves as Hispanic compared to 88 percent who classify themselves as non-Hispanic white. This is in part due to the number of first generation Hispanics in the area and the heavy Roman Catholic background in the local Hispanic population. Also, the church has made no special efforts to specifically attract those of Hispanic origins.

¹³ California Association FFA, "California FFA Center," http://www.californiaffa.org/california_ffa_center.htm (accessed August 31, 2012).

¹⁴ City of Galt, California, "Community Profile," <http://www.ci.galt.ca.us/index.aspx?page=88> (accessed June 29, 2012).

¹⁵ City-data.Com, "Galt, California," <http://www.city-data.com/city/Galt-California.html> (accessed June 29, 2012).

According to the latest church records 54 percent of the attendees are women and 46 percent are men.¹⁶ More significant to the goal of this project is the age demographic as shown in Table 1. Nearly half of the adults in the congregation are Millennials or Busters. In addition, two-thirds of the Boomers are closer in age to the Busters than the Builders. These age groupings are certainly consistent with Horizon’s non-traditional approach which is more likely to appeal to a younger age group. The nature of these demographics also should be a significant factor in the aiding the acceptance of a Bible study methodology with an emphasis on life-change, as opposed to a more traditional approach stressing memorization of Scripture and adherence to a doctrine of infallibility and inerrancy as propositional truth.

Table 1. Horizon Congregation by Generational Category -- Ages 18 and Older

Generation	Percent of Congregation
Millennials (born between 1984 and 2002)	11.6
X-Generation/Busters (born 1965–1983)	34.5
Baby Boomers (born between 1946–1964)	48.9
Builders (born between 1927–1945)	4.9
Seniors (born 1926 or earlier)	0.02

Church Culture and Values

Horizon is a conservative evangelical church associated with a Baptist denomination. I will use the terms “evangelical” and “evangelicalism” throughout this ministry focus paper. While the definition and inclusiveness of these terms are debated and are sometimes fluid, in general, I would considered the definition as provided by the

¹⁶ John Trotter, “Demographic Survey” (Report presented at the monthly elder meeting at Horizon Community Church, Galt, CA, February 12, 2009).

National Association of Evangelicals.¹⁷ They include the following characteristics as outlined by historian David Bebbington.¹⁸ The first characteristic is conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a life-long process of following Jesus. The second aspect is activism: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts. The third distinctive is biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority. And the final characteristic is crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity. In general, while I will not always apply the modifier “conservative” when I use the term, it will primarily include those groups such as the North American Baptist Conference which would tend toward the more conservative end of the evangelical spectrum. Despite Horizon’s casual nature, the general culture of the church clearly would tend toward the conservative side in both theology and secular politics.

This definition of evangelicalism is consistent with Horizon’s official core values which include worship, outreach, fellowship, discipleship, and service.¹⁹ The vision statement which was borrowed from Willow Creek Community Church is “Horizon is here to honor God by helping people discover the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ and become his devoted followers.”²⁰ Originally, the statement included the word “fully”

¹⁷ National Association of Evangelicals, “What Is an ‘Evangelical?,” <http://www.nae.net/church-and-faith-partners/what-is-an-evangelical> (accessed August 15, 2012).

¹⁸ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, England: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3.

¹⁹ John Trotter, “Partnership Class” (Class materials presented at the monthly class for potential new partners at Horizon Community Church, Galt, CA, August 5, 2012).

²⁰ Ibid.

as a modifier to “devoted.” The church removed that modifier due to the conviction that becoming a “devoted” follower was a continuing process during life on earth and would only be fully achieved in heaven. These official values and vision statement are both legitimate and important. They undoubtedly are part of Horizon’s values and are consistent with the goal of spiritual transformation. However, it is also important to look at the informal values evident in the church.

The informal values of the church stem largely from the beginning history as a “seeker-sensitive” church and the influence of the current senior pastor. Since he arrived in 1996, his leadership has moved the church to a style and approach that is somewhat unique and difficult to categorize. His approach is extremely casual and outreach-oriented. His appearance and demeanor is consistent with a masculine stereotype and this has resulted in attracting men to the church. Although he is theologically traditional, his stylistic approach is very pragmatic, and he will borrow from any church model which appears workable at Horizon. His open approach was evident when he contacted me about the possibility of merging the church which I pastored with Horizon. We did not have a close relationship at the time, and the church that I pastored had a Pentecostal theology which would not have seemed to fit with Horizon. In fact, when he approached me, he could give not logical reason for the merger other than feeling he had heard from God. He told me that the idea simply came based on a time of prayer during a period when he had limited mobility due to an injury to both his knees. He was confident that we could work through any theological differences and that expectation proved to be true.

At the time of the merger I was still working part-time at secular employment. It was determined that my position would be as associate pastor, but the specific duties

were not defined. Even today, within this unstructured environment, the parameters of my role are not clearly delineated. I am given a great deal of freedom, and I do not have a defined written job description. My role has evolved since the merger. Most of my duties have been formed by taking on work as it has been needed and is also consistent with my skills. This has resulted in a strong administrative function but leaves room for components which are more spiritually and traditionally pastoral. I have responsibility for the majority of the adult training program and the discipleship emphasis. I periodically write study guides for a series to be used in small groups. I also oversee the twelve step recovery program and an intensive discipleship training program. One of the benefits of my situation and relationship with the senior pastor is that I have the freedom and support to implement a project such as is described here.

At Horizon, programs for children and youth continue to be an emphasis on Sunday morning as well as during the week. The Sunday church services make significant use of both audio and visual presentations using a variety of media. There is a much greater emphasis on participatory worship in the Sunday services than when the church began. On a typical Sunday morning, the senior pastor dresses in shorts and sometimes will be barefoot, especially on occasions when he leads worship. Free coffee and donuts are available and may be taken into the sanctuary for the adult service. The senior pastor refers to the sanctuary as the “big room” because he considers the traditional term to be too religious and wants to emphasize that God does not live there. Some in the audience will actively participate in the worship time by singing, clapping, or raising their hands. Others might simply sit, listen, and watch, while drinking their coffee and eating their donut. The messages are designed to be relevant to everyday life. The

feedback the church has received from informal conversations with those in the congregation and the community is that Horizon is a place that is “safe” and “real.” The church believes it important that what is presented on a Sunday morning is consistent with actions during the week and is not just something put on for the service. As such, authenticity is considered to be a significant strength for the church. Both people with limited church backgrounds and those who have been hurt in a previous church experience have expressed that they are very comfortable at Horizon.

A recent church survey has shown a diversity of backgrounds for those in the congregation.²¹ The church survey was conducted during a typical Sunday service and the congregation was given time to complete it before the end of the service. Those attendees with a Catholic background comprise the single largest group as seen in Table 2. Tradition is not a high value at Horizon, and it is not unusual for those who have come from a traditional church background to tell the pastors that they almost did not come back after their first visit due to their perception of irreverence. From a negative standpoint, the open and welcoming atmosphere is interpreted sometimes by visitors and even ongoing attendees to mean that the church does not hold traditional biblical moral values, and they are surprised when the church takes a strong stand on such issues.

As a result of this non-traditional approach, the church has a heavy percentage of new or immature believers. The church has offered introductory Bible study classes in the past and provided some one-to-one discipleship mentors, but most training has taken place through the small groups. There has been no consistent, comprehensive approach to adult discipleship. The strength of the church has been in attracting people through an

²¹ John Trotter, “Demographic Survey.”

Table 2. Horizon Congregation by Family Religious Upbringing or Background

Denomination or Group	Percent of Congregation
Catholic	27.5
Baptist	21.2
Other	11.8
None	11.3
Methodist	9.4
Lutheran	8.4
Pentecostal	5.5
Presbyterian	4.3
Mormon	0.7

honest, open, and welcoming approach. The casual nature of the church also is reflected in the structure of the church, where planning tends to be less systematized than most organizations and is frequently left open-ended, allowing for change. The most significant need in the church is to improve the strategy to produce growth and maturity in those who have responded to the open invitation. This always has been one of the core values of the church, but has not been its strength.

Current and Historical Practices within Horizon

Horizon has provided opportunities for spiritual growth through three primary approaches. These have evolved naturally over the years rather than through strategic planning. The first approach is the broad-based instruction provided through the Sunday services and small groups. The second approach is a care-based ministry, which focuses on specific life issues that could impede spiritual growth and health. The third approach

is through individual and group instruction in biblical knowledge and practice; more commonly acknowledged as discipleship.

Sunday Services and Small Groups

Horizon provides vision and basic training for spiritual growth through its Sunday services and small groups. The Sunday services emphasize messages which are relevant to everyday life. There is a consistent effort to integrate topics related to the perceived needs of the congregation with biblical values and instruction. Small groups have emphasized relationships over Bible study. Recently, small groups have been classified in two categories. The first type is called “Life Groups.” These groups are ongoing and place a high value on relationships. The second type is called “Growth Groups” and focus more on instruction and Bible study.

The most structured and focused effort in promoting spiritual growth has come when the church has offered a sermon series integrated with a small-group study. This usually has been done at least once a year. In these series, the sermon on Sunday is followed by a more in-depth study or a guided discussion within the small groups during the week. Most of the series have been based on a book written by a nationally known author. The sermons are prepared based on the book or the small-group study guide, if available, and the groups will either use published materials or those prepared internally. I have been responsible for creating the internally prepared studies when that is required. All small groups are encouraged, but most often not required, to participate in the study. Series have included topics such as “40 Days of Purpose” based on *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren and “70 Days of Celebration” based on *The Celebration of*

Discipline by Richard Foster.²² These series have been well-received and have consistently resulted in an increase in small-group participation.

Life-Issue and Care Groups

Horizon has recognized that many people have life experiences and issues which significantly impede their ability to progress in the journey of spiritual transformation. The goal of these groups is first to provide an avenue of healing from various life wounds and to impart tools, strategies, and support in dealing with these issues on an ongoing basis. Secondly, the intent is to remove or mitigate the hindrances these issues cause for spiritual growth. Most of these groups are short-term, lasting from eight to twelve weeks.

The specific issues included have been divorce, grief, life-defining illness, and abuse. The church usually uses published materials for these issues and has sent leaders to external training whenever possible. The most successful and most repeated study has been based on *Healed and Set Free* by Tammy Brown.²³ The church has multiple groups each year for women and at least one group each year for men and one group for teenage girls. These groups focus on those who have been affected by abuse or other relational issues.

In addition to the short-term groups, the church also has developed an active Celebrate Recovery ministry based on the program originating at Saddleback Community

²² Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002); Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008).

²³ Tammy Brown, *Healed and Set Free ... From Lingering Hurts* (Idaho Falls, ID: Calvary Chapel of Idaho Falls, 2000).

Church.²⁴ Horizon has meetings every Friday night which include a large-group meeting with worship, teaching, and testimonies, followed by small-group sharing times which are broken into issue-specific areas. In addition, during the week, other small groups meet which focus on studying and working through the twelve steps as articulated by Alcoholics Anonymous.²⁵ The ministry also connects individuals with a sponsor who aids in maintaining accountability in the recovery process. The church has found the principles of the program to be applicable to a wide range of issues beyond chemical addiction and uses the term “hurts, hang-ups and habits.”²⁶ Spiritual transformation includes dealing with these negative issues in addition to making progress in improving positive attributes and practices.

Discipleship

Horizon is better known and has been more proactive in dealing with the negative issues than it has been in engaging the more positive practice of discipleship. However, efforts to directly promote spiritual growth are not entirely lacking. From the beginning, the church has provided some specific guidance to new Christians using several available options. The first option is in a group setting known as the “First Steps” class. This class consists of three sections comprised of four lessons each. The first section gives introductory instruction about salvation, the Bible, prayer, and the Church. The second

²⁴ For a full description of this program, see Celebrate Recovery, “A Christ-centered recovery program,” <http://www.celebraterecovery.com> (accessed August 16, 2012).

²⁵ Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous: Big Book*, 4th ed. (New York: A. A. World Services, 2001).

²⁶ John Baker, *Life's Healing Choices: Freedom from Your Hurts, Hang-Ups, and Habits* (New York: Howard Books, 2007), 1.

section deals with issues of forgiveness, temptation, faith, and relationships. Finally, the third section covers the five core values of Horizon which are discipleship, fellowship, worship and prayer, service, and outreach.

In addition to the beginning group study, the church has also worked toward establishing a one-to-one program of discipleship. This process involves directed personal study and a weekly meeting with a mentor who gives instruction, answers questions, and provides some accountability. The relationship usually lasts from four to twelve weeks. Most materials for the content focus on establishing an understanding of the basics of Christianity and fostering practices that will contribute to spiritual growth. Mentoring is also a part of a nine-month discipleship program called “The Journey” which will be described in more detail as part of the description of the influence of the North American Baptist Conference, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

While it is only provided once a year, the opportunity to walk the labyrinth, which is available each Easter, is a discipleship growth experience in the area of meditation. Horizon’s Easter service is held at a local high school each year which allows for the use of the “Big Room” to set up as a labyrinth. This is an approximately one-hour guided tour through a meditative experience of the Good Friday to Easter event. It has been provided annually since 2004. It is based on and expanded from a kit furnished by Youth Specialties.²⁷ It includes enough visual and auditory stimulation and direction to help the novice, but it still allows plenty of time for quiet meditation. The response has been extremely positive with over 125 persons participating each year. Many of the

²⁷ Jonny Baker, Steve Collins, and Kevin Draper, *The Prayer Path: A Christ-Centered Labyrinth Experience* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001).

participants have chosen to return in subsequent years. This event has exposed many people at Horizon to a prayer time which is meditative in nature.

All of these programs have been successful to varying degrees in facilitating Christian growth. As such, they continue to provide a valuable means of promoting spiritual formation at Horizon. It is expected that they will all continue, and the goal of this project will not be to supplant them, but to provide a foundation for transformative practice of Bible reading that will strengthen all three.

Barriers to Facilitating Transformational Bible Reading

Recognizing existing barriers within the church culture is an important part of developing any strategy to facilitate change. The identification here of potential impediments has come primarily through personal observation and from the demographic data obtained in the most recent survey of the Horizon congregation. While many issues can contribute to a lack of transformational Bible reading, three primary obstacles are observable within the culture at Horizon. The first obstacle is a deficiency in a theological foundation, the second is low community expectation, and the third is a lack of experience and practical training.

A good theological foundation is critical to increased participation in transformation Bible reading. This foundation forms the crux of motivation to read the Bible in a transformative manner. It consists of two important aspects which are lacking in the Horizon congregation. The foundation must include an affirmation of the importance, authority, and transformative power of the Bible. The strength of Horizon in attracting new believers and those with a limited Bible background results in a need to

teach and encourage this affirmation. In addition to such an affirmation, the individual's approach to the Bible must include more than just cognitive assent to doctrine. This aspect will be important to the more traditional and conservative congregants as well as those without a strong church background. Addressing these core beliefs will be an essential element of the strategy to introduce transformational Bible reading.

The second issue of community expectation grows out of an ongoing tension between the desire to provide an open and welcoming atmosphere to new members and the desire to move the individuals attracted by that atmosphere towards becoming highly committed believers. The atmosphere of openness tends to lend itself to low a cultural expectation towards any committed practice, including Bible reading. In addition, the broader culture of society provides many competing interests for time commitment. These can include job and family demands as well as recreation and leisure.

The third issue is a deficiency of training in how to read the Bible in a manner that facilitates spiritual transformation. Some people in the congregation have the desire but they lack the tools or experience to read the Bible transformationally. This training must provide tools that reinforce the theological foundation for Bible reading and mitigate the community and cultural factors that work against commitment to the practice. The methods must be both biblical and practical.

In Chapter 2, the broader context and influence of spiritual formation within the changing American evangelical church will be examined. This assessment will consider how changes within the broader church culture have influenced Horizon. It will also identify and evaluate what impact the broader culture may have upon implementing an effective strategy at Horizon.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEXT OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

The cultural context of Horizon exists within the broader influence of American evangelicalism. Horizon has been influenced by the culture of its denomination, but has been influenced even more by the changing landscape of evangelical church culture since the 1960s. While the more fundamentalist of those within evangelicalism have strongly resisted change, most of the evangelical church has not (or at least not successfully) resisted change. These changes and their effect upon the approach to spiritual formation within evangelicalism as well as the debate over the view of Scripture provide context for the discussion at Horizon.

The Changing of Conservative American Evangelical Culture

Both Christianity as a whole and conservative evangelicalism are traditions that do not remain static. The primary changes to have influence upon Horizon are the increasing ecumenical influences precipitated by Vatican II, the charismatic movement, the advent of mega-churches, and the emergent Church movement. All of these exist in the broader societal context moving from modernism to post-modernism. Evan Howard sees a move from the fundamentalism of the first half of the twentieth century to a new

evangelicalism where “separatists, moderates and new movements (e.g. Pentecostals, and charismatics) forge a new evangelical ‘non-denominational’ consensus [and are further stretched] through relationships with ‘evangelical Catholics,’ ‘postliberals,’ [and] the spectrum of church structures (traditional, seeker-sensitive, cell church, emerging church, etc.).”¹ All of these changes have increased the overall receptivity of conservative evangelicalism to the forms and methods of transformational Bible reading which will be a core component of the strategy of this project. This openness allows a consideration of spiritual formation which moves beyond the confines of acknowledgement and acceptance of propositional truth and proper biblical moral action towards a truly transformational approach to Bible reading and prayer.

Vatican II

The change within evangelicalism cannot be seen in isolation away from other traditions within the Church. Many circumstances outside of evangelicalism were important in contributing to the change within. In that context, although it may seem strange to begin a discourse about change among evangelicals by discussing an occurrence within the Roman Catholic Church, the event(s) of Vatican II in the early 1960s play a significant role that cannot be ignored. Howard recognizes the Second Vatican Council as an expression of renewal in the twentieth century that impacts American Christian culture even though the roots are outside North America.² He

¹ Evan Howard, “Advancing the Discussion: Reflections on the Study of Christian Spiritual Life,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 17.

² Evan Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Brazos Press, 2008), 414.

includes aspects encouraged by Vatican II such as the fostering of relationships with non-Catholics, and a renewed biblical emphasis.³ Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom see Vatican II as bringing about a change in attitudes of Catholics and Protestants towards one another. They write; “Mutual antagonism between Roman Catholics and Protestant evangelicals was once an apparently permanent fixture. But that was then. Since 1960 a new age has dawned.”⁴

Although the change cannot be solely attributed to one side of the equation, the result has been a different attitude by many evangelicals towards Catholics. It is this new age that Noll and Nystrom say creates an atmosphere “with evangelicals buying vast quantities of popular books written by Catholics Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and J. R. R. Tolkien, [and likewise] Catholics regularly read evangelicals Richard Foster, Richard Lovelace, and Max Lucado.”⁵ Within Horizon and the North American Baptist Conference, it has become routine to use Catholic retreat centers; something that would have been unthinkable for most Baptists forty years ago. Relations have improved to the extent that J. I. Packer, a signer of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy’s *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*,⁶ can make a statement in support of a meditative reading of Scripture.

³ Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 305.

⁴ Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?: An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 299.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Location 154–168.

⁶ Norman Geisler and William Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 8905.

Such meditation, modeled as it is on a great deal of the Psalms, is essentially talking to oneself about God and oneself in the realized presence of God himself; and as it naturally leads into prayer, so it should produce a degree of inner integration, stability, and devotional delight that would not otherwise be known.... It will be interesting to see how far the attempt to recover this element in the evangelical heritage will get.⁷

Timothy George goes so far as to say that the “courses on spiritual formation in Evangelical seminaries, [and the] works of ... Evangelical writers such as Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and James Houston, [show that] ‘the Catholic tradition’ is being mined and appropriated for Evangelical purposes, sometimes even to the neglect of classic Protestant sources!”⁸ The change in attitude, however, is not just among the clergy and those in the academic world.

It is not just the increased ecumenism but also a change in the attitude toward laity by the Catholic Church that opened the way for interaction and influence by the laity as well as the clergy. According to Noll and Nystrom, it is the “emphasis on the privileges of all Christians in living out the gospel [that] has encouraged ordinary Catholics to be more active in public worship, private devotion, evangelization, and service to the world.”⁹ Although some Catholics may debate this, Duncan Robertson proclaims that in *Verbum Dei* “Catholics were invited and required to read the Bible, ‘too long left to the Protestants.’”¹⁰ This kind of emphasis is why David Benner sees

⁷ J.I. Packer, “The Bible in Use: Evangelicals Seeking Truth from Holy Scripture,” in *Your Word Is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, eds. Charles W. Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1033–1037.

⁸ Timothy George “An Evangelical Reflection on Scripture and Tradition,” in *Your Word Is Truth*, eds. Colson and Neuhaus, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 385–387.

⁹ Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?*, Location 591.

¹⁰ Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 328.

Vatican II as bringing about a rediscovery of *lectio divina* by Catholic laity.¹¹ These changes are significant in that they resulted in an expansion of the traditional methods of transformational Bible reading to the Catholic laity and also have opened the door for increased dialogue and ecumenism between Catholics and conservative evangelicals beyond the level of clergy.

This increased dialogue and openness certainly has contributed to the exposure of evangelicals to traditional methods of transformational Bible reading. The importance of evangelical and Catholic relations is paramount since the methods advocated in this strategy are considered by some evangelicals to be “Catholic” practices; or at least would have been considered to be so in past times. At the local level, the Catholic influence is perhaps heightened within Horizon when it is considered that more than one in four members of the congregation has a Catholic background. Unfortunately, in my conversations with them, most indicate that they were only minimally involved, if at all, in the positive renewal among Catholic laity after Vatican II. Therefore, their experience with the traditionally Catholic ways of Bible reading and prayer are minimal. However, other factors were at work at the same time which impacted evangelical openness to traditionally non-evangelical practices.

The Charismatic Movement

The second occurrence of significance was the explosion of the charismatic movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Simon Chan considers the Pentecostal and

¹¹ David Benner, *Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 48.

charismatic renewal movements during that time to be a major factor in the rise of new developments in evangelical spirituality.¹² He goes as far as saying that the influence of the charismatic movement has created a climate in which “practices that used to be associated with a particular church tradition are freely assimilated into other traditions.”¹³ Noll and Nystrom see a specific impact between charismatic Catholics and Protestants in that the “charismatic renewal blurred lines of distinction between Protestants and Catholics as they sang common worship songs, spoke in tongues, developed a ‘personal relationship with Jesus,’ and praised God together.”¹⁴

My experience with the charismatic movement in the early 1970s was that many of the people associated with the movement became much more open to ideas which were different from their own tradition.¹⁵ Noll and Nystrom attribute this, at least in the theological sense, to the fact that “charismatic emphasis on the direct work of the Holy Spirit has made doctrine, traditional church practices, and inherited authority structures less prominent among Catholic and evangelical charismatics but also among the much

¹² Simon Chan, “New Directions in Evangelical Spirituality,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*.2, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 220.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?*, Location 623.

¹⁵ I can personally attest to that impact. In late 1969, I had an experience which brought me into the world of the charismatic movement. Through association with the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship International, I met Catholic priests and laity. I began to view them within increased respect. Such was the extent, that on occasion, I would attend Mass early on Sunday morning at a virtually all-black Catholic church in Birmingham Alabama led by charismatic priest Robert DeGrandis. I would then proceed to preach at the all-white rural Southern Baptist, where I was pastor. In addition, I was present as the leaders of the shepherding movement launched a series of worship cassettes designed to aid in home church worship. The result was the explosive growth of Hosanna/Integrity Music and the propagation of a more charismatic style worship to non-charismatic churches. The openness to other tradition extended even to the area of social issues. My particular charismatic church setting in Alabama and Kentucky was composed mostly of persons from a traditionally segregated Southern Baptist background. Nevertheless, the movement became racially integrated to such an extent that inter-racial marriages were accepted.

broader circles that have been touched in some way by charismatic influences.”¹⁶

Although the charismatic movement may not specifically have been knowledgeable concerning the ancient practices of Bible reading and meditative prayer, the emphasis on the Holy Spirit and personal experience fostered receptivity to a more contemplative and meditative approach. This movement along with Vatican II helped to open the doors of ecumenism between evangelicals and Catholics. Together, they helped to create a cultural change for many which resulted in a greater willingness to consider the value of the traditions and practices of an expanded range of Christian groups.

Multiple Influences

It is difficult to fully document in a clearly linear fashion all the events and people who have contributed to the increasing receptiveness to more open spiritual practices by conservative evangelicalism. There has been a cross-pollination of influences from Catholicism, the charismatic movement, and beyond. In general, these events and the people involved have not operated in a vacuum but within change which occurred in the broader societal culture. While, there will not be an extensive exploration of the societal change, the impact must be acknowledged. Chan sees the entire alteration as happening within a basic shift from the culture of modernity to post-modernity. He does not understand this is an abandonment of timeless truth, but that it is a recognition that the particular story of Christ “can only make sense when one participates in the community where the claim is lived.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Noll and Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?*, Location 632.

¹⁷ Chan, “New Directions in Evangelical Spirituality,” 221.

Noll sees the rise of megachurches as “related to the Charismatic movement, or at least to the relaxed institutional framework in which charismatic emphases flourish.”¹⁸ In addition, the advent of the information age also helped to expand access to and knowledge of movements, individuals, and conferences which presented viewpoints broader than that of individual denominations or local churches. This allowed for the influence of megachurches such as Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois and Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California. The Willow Creek Association includes “churches representing more than 90 denominations ... with more than 10,000 Member churches in 35 countries.”¹⁹ As has previously been noted, Horizon began by following the seeker-sensitive Willow Creek model. While these churches are obviously on the conservative side of the evangelical spectrum, their innovation and connection to the broader spectrum have expanded exposure of conservative evangelical to practices of spirituality of which they would have been previously unaware. In addition, internet websites have allowed for easy access to materials from these sources and also for greater promotion of the conferences in which these new ideas could be explored.

Other events and movements have contributed to the cross-pollination of evangelical church culture. Promise Keepers began with its first conference in 1991 and reached its peak with a reported million men gathering on the Washington Mall in

¹⁸ Mark Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 183.

¹⁹ Willow Creek Association, “Our Story,” <http://www.willowcreek.com/about> (accessed August 15, 2012).

1997.²⁰ Although most speakers were conservative, it still gave opportunity for interaction which crossed denominational, cultural, and ethnic boundaries.²¹ Conferences such as the Youth Specialties Pastors Conferences, which began in 2001, and the Catalyst Conferences, which began 1999, exposed evangelical pastors to a wide cross-section of speakers who went beyond customary denominational and theological boundaries.²² All of these events and movements have also contributed to Christian relationships built across denominational lines. These relationships are based on shared convictions and according to Noll, “the result is likely to be even further erosion of the importance of denominations as such in American Christian life.”²³ Like virtually all organizations, denominations have a self-preservation instinct, but parts of the culture and issues that sustain them are also the culture and issues that divide Christians. As these issues are seen as less important, it causes one of the aspects that drive denominationalism to decline. At Horizon, we have had discussions about the value of our relationship with our denomination. Currently, we find the value to be more in personal relationships and the sense of community than in specific doctrinal or organizational distinctives.

²⁰ Promise Keepers, “PK History,” <https://www.promisekeepers.org/about/pk-history> (accessed November 21, 2012.)

²¹ I attended the Stand in the Gap event. My impression was that little was communicated or gained from the content of the event. It was simply the magnitude and significance of the event that was noteworthy.

²² The leaders of Horizon attended the Youth Specialties Pastors Conferences from 2001 to 2004. It was at these conferences that we were first exposed to speakers and authors such as Brennan Manning, Erwin McManus, as well as representatives of emerging church movement such as Rob Bell and Brian McLaren. It was there we first discovered the possibility of using a labyrinth for an experience of prayer. See Youth Specialties, “The Story of YS,” <http://www.youthspecialties.com/aboutus/ourstory> (accessed December 6, 2012.); Catalystspace, “History,” <http://www.catalystspace.com/about/history> (accessed December 6, 2012.)

²³ Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 185.

The latest event or movement to impact conservative evangelicalism is the postmodern or emerging church movement. This movement is probably even more difficult to define explicitly than is evangelicalism. This is not surprising, since the very essence of postmodernism goes against the idea of one true definition. Stanley Grenz, called by some the “grandfather” of the movement,²⁴ perceives some resolution in that “Scholars disagree ... as to what postmodernism involves, but they have reached a consensus on one point: this phenomenon marks the end of a single, universal worldview [in that it] resists unified, all-encompassing, and universally valid explanations [and rejects] the emphasis on rational discovery through the scientific method.”²⁵

He critiques post-modernism as being wrong in rejecting the idea of metanarrative because the gospel calls us to continue to believe that the grand narrative of Christ is universal truth.²⁶ Conversely, he asserts that the Church should embrace the postmodern rejection of Enlightenment epistemology in questioning the certainty, objectivity, and inert goodness of knowledge.²⁷ He goes on to advise that “the postmodern situation requires that we embody the gospel in a manner that is post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic, and post-noeticentric.”²⁸ The movement first was known as the postmodern church, but the term “emergent” or “emerging” soon came in vogue as

²⁴ Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, Location 4502.

²⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 288–293.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Location 3047–3081.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Location 3087–3115.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Location 3123–3124.

there was some recognition that the Church should not be post-modern any more than it should be modern.²⁹

Over time, the movement has splintered into different parts which would follow more traditional conservative versus liberal issues. As early as 2006, Mark Driscoll, who had been included as part of the postmodern camp from the early days, wrote that the emergent church had become the latest form of liberalism and had simply moved from accommodating modernity to accommodating postmodernity.³⁰ Rob Bell's publication of his book *Love Wins* in 2011 evoked a strong response from Driscoll in a blog shortly after its release.³¹

Driscoll also released a blog on the same day in which he outlined four streams of the emerging church which he designated as "emerging evangelicals," "house church evangelicals," "emerging reformers," and "emerging liberals."³² He sees the primary battle between the "emerging reformers," where he places himself, and the "emerging liberals." He places Bell and Brian McLaren at the extreme end of the "emerging liberals." He fully identifies them as heretics, blogging that "emergent liberals range from

²⁹ My first contact with the postmodern/emergent church was when my son launched The Ooze (see www.theooze.com) along with current publisher Spencer Burke in 1998. They put on the first Soularize conference in 1999 and it was there that I became acquainted with Leonard Sweet and Sally Morgenthaler and their works. Up until that time my exposure to various Christian streams of thought was limited to charismatic and conservative evangelical writers and teachers.

³⁰ Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 21.

³¹ Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperOne, 2011); Mark Driscoll, "To Hell with Hell," <http://theresurgence.com/2011/03/14/to-hell-with-hell> (accessed August 28, 2012).

³² Mark Driscoll, "Navigating the Emerging Church," <http://theresurgence.com/2011/03/14/navigating-the-emerging-church> (accessed August 28, 2012).

the theological fringe of orthodoxy to heresy that crosses the line by critiquing key evangelical doctrines.”³³

Many, including me, will find value and error in each approach. Driscoll’s theology is clearly more Calvinistic than I would embrace, but Bell and McLaren stretch the limits of orthodoxy. It is too early to fully assess, but it would be ironic if the movement that helped to lower barriers between Christians evolved into one that reinforces the divisions. Regardless, there is no doubt that the emerging church movement has contributed to a more open approach to spiritual formation within the evangelical church. Change, however, cannot be evaluated only in movements within the Church itself.

Robert Wuthnow writes about the change in American church culture from a broader perspective. He sees “in the late 1980s and 1990s ... a renewed interest in the inner self as a way of relating to the sacred.”³⁴ He describes much of the change as moving from a dwelling-oriented spirituality to a seeker-oriented spirituality,³⁵ and that “the newer pattern emphasizes looser connections, diversity, and negotiation; practical activity takes precedence over organizational positions.”³⁶ In this milieu, the propagation and publishing of materials pertinent to spiritual formation has burgeoned. Foster has had considerable influence through his book *Celebration of Discipline* which was first

³³ Driscoll, “Navigating the Emerging Church”.

³⁴ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 142.

³⁵ Wuthnow uses the term “seeker” in reference to an ongoing spiritual orientation rather than in reference to someone who has not yet chosen to follow Christ.

³⁶ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 9.

published in 1978.³⁷ Willard has also contributed to the expansion of the propagation of spiritual disciplines through *The Spirit of the Disciplines* in 1988 and *Renovation of the Heart* in 2002.³⁸ It is indicative of wide acceptance within the evangelical community when a conservative institution such as Biola University introduces a publication like the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*.³⁹ Other authors with books on spiritual formation and a more meditative style of prayer which have been published in recent years are too numerous to mention. All of these movements and influences have contributed to an atmosphere in which the North American Baptist Conference and Horizon would be able to accept and promote an initiative which is based on such a wide range of sources.

North American Baptists

In addition to the broad contextual influence of the changing face of American evangelicalism, Horizon has been impacted more immediately by the North American Baptist Conference. As a plant of the Northern California Association of North American Baptists, Horizon's cultural and theological roots are within the Baptist tradition. The statement of faith which is used by Horizon is taken almost word for word from the statement of faith published by the denomination.⁴⁰ Key elements of the statement of

³⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*.

³⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002); Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988)

³⁹ University Institute of Spiritual Formation at Biola, "Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care" 1, no. 1 (Spring 2008).

⁴⁰ North American Baptist Conference, "Our Beliefs," <http://www.nabconference.org/about-us/our-beliefs> (accessed August 1, 2012).

faith would include a high view of the authority of Scripture, Trinitarian doctrine, substitutionary atonement, and the need for personal redemption through faith in Christ. These core views of the denomination are not unique to North American Baptists and are consistent with larger denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention.⁴¹

Baptists traditionally have emphasized the autonomy of the local church, and therefore, the denomination has impacted Horizon primarily through influence and not through direction. The single largest influence within the focus of this project has come through an initiative called The Leadership Center launched in 2001.⁴² The initiative was based on the work of Reese, using the model as described in his doctoral work at Fuller Theological Seminary.⁴³ The initiative, in conjunction with Reese's organization, VantagePoint3, was intended as a program to develop leaders within the individual churches of the NAB. Reese and his staff provide continuing mentorship and support for those using the program.

Horizon began participating in the initiative in 2005.⁴⁴ The model provides for an intensive high-commitment program consisting of a nine month obligation in three separate years. Initially, multiple churches within the local region of the denomination

⁴¹ Southern Baptist Convention, "The Baptist Faith and Message," <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp#i> (Accessed August 1, 2012).

⁴² Ken Nemson, *The History, Adoption, and Implementation of The Leadership Center Training Model within the North American Baptist Conference*, 2005, North American Baptist Conference, Oakbrook Terrace, IL.

⁴³ Reese, "A Philosophy of Education for Leadership Development through the Leadership Center Training Model."

⁴⁴ The information provided about the history of the Leadership Center and its impact upon Horizon, as well as the denominational aspects, is based primarily on my personal participation in the initiative since 2005. Ken Nemson, who was the head of the initiative for the denomination, was a personal mentor to me from 2005 until his death in 2009.

participated and portions of the program (i.e. retreats and seminars) were done within a multi-church atmosphere. From the start, Horizon chose to deemphasize the leadership aspect of the program, opting instead to use it as a discipleship program, assuming that leadership development would result as a by-product. Participation within the denomination as a whole began to decline, and by 2008, most of the other NAB churches had ceased to participate. Horizon decided to continue the program without the inter-church interaction, and it has continued to be successful.⁴⁵ The commitment level for the nine month program includes two hours per week in a group meeting, an estimated one to three hours personal study time, and a cost of five hundred dollars to the participant. Despite the required time and financial investment by the participant, which is much greater than the commitment required for most church programs, ninety-three Horizon members have completed the first year of the curriculum. The participants in the program have expressed such positive reviews that twenty-nine Horizon members have enrolled in the program for the coming year.

The influence of the Leadership Center initiative has impacted Horizon in a number of ways. The greatest impact has been in providing a program which introduces the concept of spiritual formation as a long-term ongoing process. The structure is multi-faceted and much more open-ended than the traditional Baptist approach. It has also exposed the participants to authors and sources beyond the conservative Baptist world.

⁴⁵ The difference in ongoing success of the program at Horizon in comparison to other churches was due to the discipleship versus leadership emphasis. The leadership emphasis was much more narrowly focused, and provided a smaller pool of participants. In conversations with Reese and with Rob Loane, they have acknowledged that Horizon's success has influenced them in giving more emphasis to the discipleship aspect of the program. In fact, the name of the program has been changed from the "The Leadership Center" to "The Journey", which is the name Horizon used internally from the beginning of its participation. For more information about VantagePoint3 see their website at <http://www.vantagepoint3.org>.

These authors have included such people as Henry Nouwen and David Benner. The participants are also introduced to spiritual disciplines, including *lectio divina*, which are an important aspect of the program. The program focuses upon three main questions. The first question is “Who is God?” The second one is “Who am I?” And, the third question is “What does God desire to do through me?”⁴⁶ In looking for answers to these questions, the individual proceeds through a journey of self-discovery and God-discovery that moves outside of the more conservative emphasis on simply teaching correct doctrine and correct action. The program helps the individual to begin to embrace a culture of spiritual transformation. Embracing that culture and mindset will carry over to all aspects of spiritual life. It is assumed that transformational Bible reading will be a significant part of that outlook.

⁴⁶ [Randy Reese?], *The Emerging Journey*, (Sioux Falls, SD: VantagePoint3, 2009), ii.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL FOUNDATION

CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

In order to explain the role of the Bible in spiritual transformation, this chapter will define spiritual transformation beyond the brief explanation given in the introduction. Once this has been defined, the next section will look at the Bible in relationship to the process of spiritual transformation. It will consider the nature of the Bible in addressing the issues of inerrancy, authority, and power. Finally, there will be an examination of the purpose of Scripture and how the understanding of that purpose affects its use in relation to spiritual transformation within the Church.

Spiritual Transformation

In the Introduction, spiritual transformation, or the more classical term sanctification, is briefly defined as reaching the goal of conformity to the image of Christ. A complete explanation is required in order to evaluate the role of the Bible in that process. Two authors have given definitions that help to form a framework for the definition advocated for this thesis. Robert Mulholland defines spiritual transformation this way:

Christian spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of

Christ for the sake of others Genuine spiritual formation ... is the great reversal of the negative spiritual formation of our culture. It reverses our role from being the subject who controls the objects of the world, to being the object of the loving purposes of God who seeks to 'control' us for our perfect wholeness.¹

Richard Peace writes: "The goal of transformation is to be conformed to the image of Christ. The aim of transformation is to be so changed that who we are is conformed to who Christ is. The aim of transformation is to become in reality what we already are in fact: bearers of the image of Christ."² Both authors see the goal of transformation as "conformity with Christ." However, Mulholland goes further to include the outcome of that transformation as being "for the sake of others." He would consider that purpose not as a separate part of the transformation, but as one that is inherent within the nature of Christ himself. Conformity to Christ will necessarily change the nature of a Christian's relationships with others. This is because "Scripture is not only a place where we find ourselves encountered by God, but a place where God probes the nature of our relationships with one another."³

Some writers will use the term transformation while others will use formation, but generally they are used interchangeably.⁴ Transformation is the better term because it more accurately describes the process. Christians are not shapeless clay being formed. They were formed in the process of birth. They have beliefs, values, ideas, natures, and

¹ Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1985), 25–27.

² Richard Peace, "Spiritual Transformation, Taking on the Character of Christ," (Class printed materials for SP750 "The Bible as Transforming Agent," Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, October 17–21, 2005), 18.

³ Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 30.

⁴ See Evan Howard's use of the terms for two distinct meanings in the section below on Authority and Power.

emotions that already existed prior to the need for transformation. In fact, those beliefs, values, etc., which had been previously formed, are the reason they need transformation. They may have been transformed multiple times before, but the issue is not the number of times there has been a change. Instead, it is the foundation upon which that forming or transforming took place.

Any change that is not based on Christ still remains established on a foundation of conformity to the world. The transformational concept is one of fundamental change. The foundation for the believer is conformity to Christ, and this is to be a transformation from conformity to the world. In Romans 12:2, Paul tells the believer “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” The new is put on in place of the old. Paul writes further, “that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:22–24). An understanding of spiritual transformation as a complete change based on conformity to Christ leads to an exploration of the nature and purpose of Scripture. It is that nature and purpose which will determine its role in the process.

The Nature of Scripture

The nature of Scripture is critical to an understanding of the relationship of Scripture to the objective of spiritual transformation. A discussion of that underlying character requires several issues to be addressed. This will include the issue of inerrancy

and conjunctively the question of the nature of Scripture in terms of authority and power. These topics naturally lead to an investigation into the purpose of Scripture. The results of an exploration of these issues and questions will guide the formation of the foundational principles of the strategy presented in this treatise.

Inerrancy

Any discussion of the nature of Scripture cannot totally ignore the issue of “infallibility” or “inerrancy.” N.T. Wright outlines much of the issue in *The Last Word: Scripture and the Authority of God—Getting Beyond the Bible Wars*.⁵ Instead of framing the question as to whether or not the Bible is infallible or inerrant, he would rather consider the issue of how it is authoritative. His presentation is persuasive, although probably unsatisfying to those who would see infallibility and inerrancy as a critical foundation to faith. Norman Geisler and William Roach present an extensive case in support of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* in their book *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation*.⁶ Despite the elegant extensiveness of the argument which they present, it comes down to a logical syllogism that since God is perfect; anything He creates must be perfect. Therefore, any denial of the inerrancy of the original autographs ultimately denies faith in the perfect nature of God.

⁵ N. T. Wright, *The Last Word : Scripture and the Authority of God — Getting Beyond the Bible War* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 23.

⁶ International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (Oakland, CA.: The Council, 1978); Norman Geisler, and William Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 4417–4418.

They are inconsistent in the logic of their argument. They go on to say that it is not necessary for the transmission of the perfect autographs to be maintained since the essential message comes through even without them. They write: “So, we securely have 99+ percent of the text and 100 percent of the essential truths of the Christian faith. Hence, we do not need to possess the autographs.”⁷ This would seem to be an implicit acknowledgement that absolute inerrancy is not critical to the conveyance of the Word of God. The real argument is not that inerrancy is necessary for communication of God’s word, but rather that anything less than inerrancy communicates that we have an imperfect God. They do not explain why an imperfect autograph communicates an imperfect God, but the failure to maintain that perfection in transmission does not communicate an impotent God.

The theology of infallibility and inerrancy may affect the interpretation of the Bible to some extent, but it generally does not impact someone’s personal use of Scripture. Many Christians, who would argue vehemently for a “high” view of the Bible, still don’t use it in a way that significantly impacts their life. While infallibility and inerrancy may be legitimate questions, they should not, and need not, be the focal point in the discussion of an approach to the Bible. Joel Green recognizes the reality of this situation as he writes: “In short, although scandalous, it remains true that there is no necessary path from affirmations of the trustworthiness of the Bible to reading the Bible as Christian Scripture.”⁸ While faith is essential, it is not faith in a doctrine of Scripture, but rather a belief that God speaks to us today through the Bible which motivates us to

⁷ Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, Location 4417–4418.

⁸ Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 147.

read it in openness to transformation. Walter Brueggemann focuses on the reason and importance of the authority of the Bible:

The authority of the canon is also crucial because it is an assertion and agreement that these books, like no others, will receive our attention and will shape and govern our imagination. It means we will wait on this literature for whatever words of life and truth we expect to be given to us. It means that in this literature we are prepared to find the criteria by which other truth (in other literature) is to be assessed.⁹

The dogma concerning a view about the infallibility, inerrancy, or authority of Scripture is important inasmuch as it affects the way in which we use it. Green again writes: “It is never enough to make affirmations about the authority of Scripture. This is because what it means to refer to the Bible as Christian Scripture is to declare its role in shaping a people, transforming their most basic commitments, their dispositions, and their identities.”¹⁰

On the extreme end, an uncompromising position on the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible may actually be detrimental to accomplishing the purpose of spiritual transformation. Geisler and Roach suggest that God may have intentionally failed to preserve the original because of the human tendency to worship relics.¹¹ If taken literally, the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, which is integral to inerrancy for most ardent exponents, works against the idea of the Bible working in cooperation with other change agents as will be outlined later. Paul Hinlicky asserts that the original intent of the reformation idea of *sola scriptura* was not totally exclusive but rather meant to exclude

⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 120–121.

¹⁰ Green, *Seized by Truth*, 170.

¹¹ Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, Location 4417–4418.

“only what is contrary to Scripture, not everything except what is explicitly written in Scripture.”¹² Some have suggested that the term *prima scriptura* which emphasizes the primacy of God’s revelation in Scripture would be more accurate.¹³ It is possible that the result of a strict view of inerrancy and the accompanying emphasis on *sola scriptura* with an overemphasis on propositional truth does result in bibliolatry and thereby minimizes openness to the action of the Holy Spirit in pursuing spiritual transformation. The more important issue in relationship to spiritual transformation is the nature of Scripture.

Authority and Power

Discussions of the nature of Scripture often focus primarily on the issue of acceptance by the hearer. While the interaction of the reader with the Bible is relevant, the essential nature of the Bible exists apart from that interaction. Therefore, it is important to affirm that the twofold nature of the authority and power of Scripture is inherent within itself. The efficacy of transformation normally may involve the active participation of the hearer, but the inherent nature is not dependent upon that participation. There is value in Howard’s discussion of the difference between “transformation” and “spiritual formation.” His precise use of the terms involved is questionable, but the concept he expresses is helpful when he says, “Whereas ‘transformation’ may refer to the Godward change flowing from relationship with God (‘spirituality’), ‘spiritual formation’ tends to refer to the human side of the equation;

¹² Paul Hinlicky, “The Lutheran Dilemma,” *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology*, 8, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 45.

¹³ N. Clayton Croy, *Prima Scriptura: An Introduction to New Testament Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 130–131.

those means by which we seek to ‘work out’ the transformation that the Spirit ‘works in’.”¹⁴ The human side of the equation will be explored further in Chapter 4. The purpose here is to examine God’s side of the process as it relates to the nature of Scripture.

Many times I have heard sermons which have explained the authority (*exousia*) and power (*dunamis*) of Scripture by using a police officer as the example.¹⁵ In this illustration, the officer’s badge represents the authority that comes from the government, and the gun represents the power to enforce that authority. The example serves to illustrate the dual nature of Scripture. The Bible has authority because the government gives it authority. In this case, it is God as king who is the government. This is seen in the premier Bible reference for inspiration, “All Scripture is inspired by God.” (2 Tm 3:16). The Bible has authority because it is “inspired by God” or “God-breathed” (*theopneustos*). In this sense, while belief in absolute inerrancy may not be required, a confidence that the Bible accurately conveys God’s words and his intent is essential. The profitability of the written word stems from its source. Paul and other writers of the Bible do not have authority within themselves any more than the police officer has authority within himself. The words that they write carry the authority of God because he is the one who inspired them.

The power of Scripture as illustrated by the police officer’s gun is the active enforcement and propagation of the authority of God. God speaks of the power through the prophet Jeremiah as he proclaims “‘Is not My word like fire?’ declares the LORD,

¹⁴ Evan Howard, “Advancing the Discussion: Reflections on the Study of Christian Spiritual Life,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 13.

¹⁵ The first time I heard this illustration would have been from John Bartley in a personal conversation, Warrior, AL, 1969.

‘and like a hammer which shatters a rock?’” (Jer 23:29). The writer of Hebrews asserts that “the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). Just as the way in which a police officer uses his power varies in relation to the response of the person with whom he interacts, so the power of the word of God varies in relation to the response of the hearer. The analogy of the sword is affirmed by Paul when he writes to the Ephesians that they should, “take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:17). It must be recognized that the ownership of the “sword” belongs to the Holy Spirit. While a Christian may exercise that power, the authority belongs to God. The believer is not to misuse the power of the Word of God, any more than a police officer is to misuse the power of his gun. It is the source of the authority that authorizes the use of power.

In actual practice, the two sides of the nature of Scripture are interrelated and often indistinguishable. When someone is given an order by a police officer, they do not stop to consider whether they are responding to the authority or to the power of the officer. They just respond. The normal response is to obey. In the same way, a person’s interaction with Scripture does not depend on a continuous nuanced evaluation of whether they are responding to God’s authority or to his power.

Karl Barth recognizes that the Word of God is different in nature from that of the words of men. For humans, there is a dichotomy between speech and act. The Word of God, however, is also his act. It does not have any need to be supplemented. For God,

speech and action are one and the same.¹⁶ This is supremely illustrated in the creation narrative in Genesis chapter one as repeatedly God's words "Let there be" were followed by "and there was." God's speech as act implies its power to rule and to transform as seen when Paul says that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16) Again, in I Corinthians 1:18, Paul writes: "The word of the cross is ... the power of God." Barth notes:

We are acquainted with the Word of God to the degree that we are acquainted with this power Recognition of the power of God's Word to rule has the following implication. We are speaking of God's Word. Therefore we have to speak of its power, its might, its effects, the changes it brings about. Because the Word of God makes history, as Word it is also act.¹⁷

He sees that the power of the written word is "because the Word of God is Jesus Christ and because its efficacy is not distinct from the Lordship of Jesus Christ."¹⁸ He further affirms that there something inherent in the Word of God that makes it powerful above and beyond the believer's interpretive skill and effort so that "something takes place that for all our hermeneutical skill cannot be brought about by hermeneutical skill."¹⁹ The choice which is made does not determine the power of the God's words, it merely recognizes it.

The Church recognizes the authority of the Bible because its power is discernible.

Paul Achteimer makes the point that the Bible's authority stems from "the life-

¹⁶ Karl Barth, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Doctrine of the Word of God, Prolegomena to Church Dogmatics: vol. 1, pt. 1, 2nd ed.*, Church Dogmatics Series (London: Burns & Oates Imprint Continuum International Publishing Group Limited, 1975), 143.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 147–148.

transforming power that those words have demonstrated in the life of the community of faith.”²⁰ The power of Scripture has been demonstrably seen within the life of the Church. Paul Ricoeur affirms that the power of Scripture is seen in proclamation as well, when he says, “There would be no proclamation if the word, too, were not powerful; that is, if it did not have the power to set forth the new being it proclaims.”²¹ Eugene Peterson crystallizes the theological assertion of the power of the Bible stating that, “by keeping company with the writers of Holy Scripture, we are schooled in a practice of reading and writing that is infused with an enormous respect — more than respect, awed reverence — for the revelatory and transformative power of words.”²² The power of the Word of God is part of its message.

While those that advocate varying positions on the issue of inerrancy may disagree on how the Bible is to be approached, they tend to agree that the nature of it is one of authority and power. Some authors cited above may emphasize authority over power or vice-versa, but all see both elements as critical to comprising its nature. One of the issues that is raised in almost any situation involving authority and power is how that authority and power is to be used. Therefore, if the nature of the Bible consists of authority and power, the next logical issue to consider is the relationship of that character to its purpose.

²⁰ Paul Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals, 1st ed.*, Biblical Perspectives on Current Issues (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 159.

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 65.

²² Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 3.

The Purpose of Scripture

The understanding of the purpose of Scripture will impact how it is used in the Church. Both historical and literary approaches to reading the Bible affect the way the Bible is read and preached. With the advent of the Enlightenment and modernity, a new way of reading the Bible was introduced. This resulted in different approaches in the liberal and conservative Christian camps. Conservatives read the Bible not so much to find out what it had to say, but to prove its historic and scientific accuracy, and to defend the authorship of the various books of the Bible. Because liberal critics taught that the Bible was not historically or scientifically correct, conservatives rightly saw that the truth of the Bible as a revelation from God was at stake.

The conservative argument against the liberals focused on the conviction that God could not lie, and since God does not lie, the Bible must be accurate in everything it says about history and science. Therefore, conservatives read the Bible defensively. The original meaning of the biblical narrative became lost when conservatives rushed to verify the Bible as a historical and scientific document. For example, the view of the purpose of the creation narratives shifted from God's liturgy, and a vision for the world and its people, to being an historical and scientific account of the beginnings of the world. The historical and scientific way of reading the Bible distanced the readers from the "who of the Bible" to the "when and how of creation."²³

The purpose of Scripture cannot be divorced from its nature. Change and transformation are common themes in the references given above. The words tied to the

²³ Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1146–1153.

power of the Bible are “the changes it brings about,” “life-transforming power,” “the new being it proclaims,” and “transformative power.” People may come to the Bible for a variety of reasons. For some it is for comfort, for others it is a rule book, and for many it is an answer book for life’s questions. While all these reasons have validity, they are subsets of the overarching purpose of Scripture which is spiritual transformation.

In considering the purpose of Scripture, it is understood that “salvation” encompasses transformation. Salvation is not just a rescue from the old, but also promises a transformation to the new. The same Word of God that was active in the initial formation of man in Genesis is also at work in the transformation of fallen man into the new redeemed man (Rom 1:16, 1 Cor 1:18, and 2 Cor 5:17). This encompasses a process in which Scripture is active (Phil 1:6, 1 Pt 2:2, and Jas 1:21). Barth asserts this view when he says that “the promise of the word of God is not as such an empty pledge which always stands, as it were, confronting man. It is the transposing of man into the wholly new state of one who has accepted and appropriated the promise”²⁴ An understanding of the transforming power of the Bible is the foundation for reading it. Redundant as it may seem, an important part of establishing transformational Bible reading is to recognize the principle that the seminal purpose of Scripture is to transform. The purpose is to conform the reader to the image of Christ (Rom 8:20).

The deeper question concerning the purpose of the Bible is why it is an essential part of discipleship. The answer goes beyond the mere need to be obedient and affects the approach to reading it. Some Christian today read the Bible for information, whether it

²⁴ Barth, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 152.

concerns knowledge of God's will, his rules, the coming future, or any other set of facts. Some even approach the Bible as a tool to be used in "combat" citing Ephesians 6:17 as a proof-text. Mulholland outlines the basic conflict between the reasons why Christians read the Bible in his book, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*. The core issue is whether they read for information or for formation. Few would dispute Mulholland's claim that "we have been trained primarily to seek information when it comes to reading."²⁵ In reading the Bible for information the reader retains control. Kyle Strobel talks about a point in his life when there was a change in his outlook. Instead of the Bible being his object, he became the object of the Bible. He says, "I had always understood the Word as a sword in that it was a tool we could use, but I never expected the sword to turn back on me, piercing into the evil in my own heart."²⁶

Peterson agrees that the Bible is primarily formational rather than informational. He says that the Church has always held the position that the "Holy Scripture that reveals God's ways to us is necessary and basic to our formation as human beings. In our reading of this book, we come to realize that what we need is not primarily informational, telling us things about God and ourselves, but formational, shaping us into our true being."²⁷ For him, the challenge is not in getting people to read the Bible, but in getting them to read it for the purpose of formation. He writes: "What is neglected is reading the Scriptures formatively and reading in order to live."²⁸ He uses the biblical imagery of eating the

²⁵ Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 51.

²⁶ Kyle Strobel, *Metamorphosis: Jesus as a Way of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 60.

²⁷ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 23–24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

book as seen in the Revelation of St. John as well as in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. He put it this way: “Eating a book takes it all in, assimilating it into the tissues of our lives. Readers become what they read. If Holy Scripture is to be something other than mere gossip about God, it must be internalized.”²⁹ This idea of eating the book, instead of merely reading, conveys an idea that is central to the concept of transformational Bible reading. Richard Foster’s latest work continues this theme as he writes:

Our deep concern for the Bible as the foundational text for Christian spiritual formation continues in this little book, which has been developed to invite us into a deeper and more authentic life with God Always, the purpose of such understanding is not that we will become proficient in our Bible knowledge. Rather, it is that we will be enabled to live out of this “life that is life indeed” into ongoing discipleship to Jesus in such a way that our hearts and minds are progressively transformed into the very nature of the heart and mind of God.³⁰

Foster reinforces the idea that the believer does not read the Bible primarily for knowledge, but rather for the ultimate purpose of conformity to Christ.

The purpose of transformation is to reshape the entire person. Tremper Longman tells us that it is for the whole person, and emphasizes again that the purpose of the Bible is not just to deal with the intellect. He writes: “The Bible ... addresses our whole being Understanding this emphasis is crucial, or we open the Bible expecting that its main purpose will be merely to inform our intellect The Bible addresses us as whole people, and that is why we must come to it with our hearts — in order to experience it.”³¹ David Kelsey understands that Christians cannot truly read the Bible as Scripture if they

²⁹ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 20.

³⁰ Richard Foster with Kathryn A. Helmers, *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), VIII.

³¹ Tremper Longman, *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), 31.

do not understand that to take it as Scripture has to do with its function. He insists that this function is to “shape persons’ identities so decisively as to transform them.”³² It can be argued that is a step of progress to see this as not just a transformation of understanding, but also a transformation of behavior. Green goes further than that by asserting that “whereas the Church and its related institutions tend to focus on ‘moral acts,’ Scripture is far more concerned with shaping our imaginations, our patterns of thinking, which, inevitably, find expression in transformed commitments and practices. Behavior serves as a display case for our deepest commitments.”³³ It is not just intellectual thinking or even just behavior that needs to be transformed. It is the inner man, and not just the outward actions, that must be changed.

A consideration of the nature of the Bible as power and authority cannot be divorced from its intended purpose. That purpose to reconcile humans to God and to conform them to his image. So the essence of the answer to the question is that Christians need to read the Bible because it is transformative in nature and transformation is an essential element of discipleship. The Word of God has the authority, power, and purpose to be a transforming agent. Since transformation is the goal and the Bible is the primary means to that goal, the next action is to delineate the foundational principles for a methodology of transformational Bible reading.

³² David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 90.

³³ Green, *Seized by Truth*, 19.

CHAPTER 4

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE STRATEGY

Several elements are necessary to provide a foundation for the strategy to implement transformational Bible reading at Horizon. Given the open atmosphere and the numbers of people with minimal biblical background at Horizon, it will be important to clearly define the essential truths of transformational Bible reading. An understanding of what is essential will help to shape the culture of transformational Bible reading in both the implementation as well as the reception of teaching. The next point of attention will be to explore the relationship of the Bible to other change agents. Finally, there will be a discussion of the relationship of transformational Bible reading to other spiritual disciplines.

Essential Truths of Spiritual Transformation

In order to adequately plan a strategy for transformational Bible reading, there must be a clear understanding of the essential truths or components of such an approach. Not only are these truths needed for development of a plan, they also provide a needed understanding for the practitioner which is both motivational and contextual. These components build upon the foundation of the role of the Bible in spiritual transformation

as expounded in the previous chapter as well as what has been learned from both ancient and modern methods of transformational Bible reading. There are four essential elements to be presented that underpin the strategy proposed in this project. Spiritual transformation is necessary, progressive, God-generated, and holistic.

The Necessity of Spiritual Transformation

First, spiritual transformation is a necessary and integral part of the Christian life. Change is inherent within a person's relationship to God. The story of the Old Testament is one of God's interactions with people which resulted in a change in their lives. This is true in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, It continues in the story of Moses and Joshua in the in transition from Egypt to the promised land. It is seen in the stories of the kings and prophets of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel expressed this when he wrote: "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (Ez 36:26–27). Spiritual transformation is not an option. It must be the primary purpose of the study of the Scriptures. Paul expressed this goal when he wrote to Timothy that Scripture is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tm 3:16–17). Teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness are all actions whose goal is change. Paul goes further to show that this change will result in the believer being prepared to do God's work.

This must be the purpose of the Church and the individual Christian as well. The

necessity of transformation makes sense even in the context of an evangelical setting in which the focus is more on the afterlife than the present life. Foster points out that the need for transformation will be beneficial in the next life when he says, “heaven is most certainly an important part of this ‘with God life.’ This life is, after all, eternal. Hence, we want to become the kind of person inwardly, so that when we do get to heaven, we will want to stay there. [We] will have been so transformed that we will feel right at home in heaven.”¹ The necessity for spiritual transformation is true. This truth applies both to a Christian’s purpose here on earth, and to the purpose in the life to come.

The Progressive Nature of Spiritual Transformation

Second, spiritual transformation occurs as a long-term gradual process, but it also includes times of sudden significant transformation. The predominant pattern of spiritual transformation is a gradual change over time. An examination of only the stories of people in Scripture could create the misconception that the normal pattern is dramatic and sudden change. However, the biblical record of people’s lives tends to be a snapshot and usually focuses on crisis events. This is not to diminish the veracity of Scripture or to downplay the importance of a crisis experience which yields dramatic change, but it is a recognition, based on personal experience and the testimony of others, that most change happens slowly over time in conjunction with periodic crisis events. In addition, the Bible also confirms the gradual aspect of this change.

Paul’s and Peter’s writings give evidence of the gradual progression of Christian transformation. Both authors use analogies which imply growth and change over time.

¹ Foster and Helmers, *Life with God*, xi.

Paul writes: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). Peter agrees, and compares it to natural human development, when he proclaims that the believer should be “like newborn babies, [and] long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Pt 2:2). Mel Lawrenz points to Jesus use of agricultural metaphors as being indicative that “God’s way of doing things in this world is process Growth, as the ordinary way things happen in the world, shows the way God has typically chosen to work in the world.”² The quest for spiritual transformation is a marathon, not a sprint. However, Christians must also remain open to those events and moments which God uses to accomplish change in a way that is dramatic in both speed and impact.

The Source of Spiritual Transformation

The third essential element has two parts which are the role of God and the role of the believer. Christians are powerless without God to effectuate either their own transformation, or that of others. The Bible is clear that God himself is the source of transformation. However, God has chosen to work in cooperation with the individual. Christians cannot transform themselves or others, but God requires their participation in the process. Paul describes his own work when he says that he “planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth” (1 Cor 3:6–7). He teaches that it is God who brings about the change. At the same time, he paradoxically writes that

² Mel Lawrenz, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 31.

Christians are to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). He also points out that it is the job of teachers, among others, to help people grow and change:

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:11–13).

It is clear that God uses people in the process. Pastors and teachers, then, have the responsibility to do the work of teaching the Bible with the purpose of transformation, but also with the understanding that ultimately it is only God who can bring about the transformation. Brueggemann explains that this is the goal of pastoral care:

Pastoral care informed by the Gospel is entrusted with a ministry of transformation. . . . Thus evangelical pastoral care is an act of powerful, resilient hope against the despair of our world which believes no change is possible. But it also hopes against the romanticism of our age which believes change is an easy painless option. Change is not impossible, but it is not easy or painless. Pastoral care is buoyant about the prospect for the change and candid about the cost.³

The Bible teacher’s purpose is to cooperate with God and the student to bring about spiritual transformation. Wendell Berry expresses this sentiment poetically as part of his Sabbath Poems,

Whatever is foreseen in joy
Must be lived out from day to day.
Vision held open in the dark
By our ten thousand days of work.
Harvest will fill the barn; for that
The hand must ache, the face must sweat.

And yet no leaf or grain is filled
By work of ours; the field is tilled
And left to grace. That we may reap,
Great work is done while we're asleep.

³ Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience*, 161.

When we work well, a Sabbath mood
Rests on our day, and finds it good.⁴

It must be understood that the individual's participation and effort is necessary, but ultimately the work is performed by God.

The Holistic Nature of Spiritual Transformation

Fourth, transformation involves the whole person. It is not necessary for there to be competing interests in the transformation of the entire person. There is no need in the Church to debate whether change is required in the mind rather than the heart, or in the will rather than the emotions. Jesus taught his followers that they are to love God with their entire being.

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mk 12:28–31).

The idea of this holistic transformation has been expressed in a variety of ways. Henry Holloman argues for a "wholistic [*sic*]" model of spirituality and defines the whole Christian person this way:

By the *whole Christian person* we mean all the main functions of mankind made in the image of God (Gn 1:26–27; 9:6; Jas 3:9) and the body as well (Gn 2:7). Jesus grew in every major area of His person (Lk 2:52, "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men"). Spiritual formation works with the whole person, not only with a soul to be saved or a mind to be taught. And each area of personality must be integrated as well as

⁴ Wendell Berry, *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems, 1979–1997* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1998), 18.

developed. Then, wholistic personal development and integration requires that we submit our spiritual, intellectual, volitional, emotional, moral, physical and relational functions to biblical truth (cf. Lk2:52; Rom 6:19; 12:1–2; 2 Cor 10:5).⁵

Authors also have expressed the areas of the human totality in various ways.

Mulholland expresses it in terms of a personality inventory and recognizes the tendency to focus on the areas of spirituality that fit one's own type.⁶ Dallas Willard defines the parts personhood as heart, mind, body, social life, and soul.⁷ Peace breaks it out in defining the learning goals. He lists the five areas as cognitive, affective, behavior, structure, and relationships.⁸

The purpose of categorization of areas of the whole person is to facilitate holistic transformation, and to mitigate limiting transformation to only part of the person. Five areas that are consistent in intent, if not in terminology, with those listed above will be used to facilitate that purpose at Horizon. These areas are cognitive, affective, behavioral, relational, and spiritual. The cognitive area includes the mind and how a person thinks. The affective portion relates to emotions and attitudes. It is how a person feels. The behavioral aspect expresses itself in action. It is what a person does. The relational area involves how a person relates to others. Finally, the spiritual category is how one relates to God.

⁵ Henry Holloman, "Wholistic Model for Spirituality." (Paper presented at the annual National ETS Meeting, November 18, 1995, Philadelphia), 12.

⁶ Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 67–73.

⁷ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 34.

⁸ Richard Peace, "A Paradigm to Guide Transformation," (Class printed materials for SP750 "The Bible as Transforming Agent," Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, October 17–21, 2005), 2.

The last component is the most unique when compared to other lists. It is also the most difficult to impact specifically. Even though it is more intangible than the others, it is included because it is important to understand that God is at work in a person's spirit in ways that cannot always be recognized with human senses, logic, or emotions. Paul describes this in his first letter to the Corinthians:

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (1 Cor 2:10–14).

The transformation of the human spirit will ultimately affect all the other areas, as it is the core of the individual's being. Over time, the nature of a person's inner being will determine what they think, feel, do, and how they relate.

The Relationship of the Bible to Other Change Agents

The Bible does not work alone as a change agent. The Bible is not a magically sacred object that changes people as they worship it. This is where an extreme view of inerrancy and of *sola scriptura* is counterproductive if, by that, it means that the Bible works alone. The exclusion of other change agents will impair the transforming power of Scripture. Strobel sees the Bible working in conjunction with other "informers" of the reader's worldview. His use of the term "worldview" or "vision" is consistent with the idea of an inner-self and he writes: "This is the equipment you will need for the *metamorpha* journey: the Bible, the Spirit, and a community of believers to travel with. I

like to call these the ‘informers’ because they are the tools Jesus uses to alter, or inform, our vision.”⁹

The Holy Spirit is the supreme change agent. There can be no serious argument against the supremacy of the Spirit, unless one is willing to renounce the Trinitarian doctrine which affirms that the Spirit is God. This is despite the recognition that one’s interpretation of the action of the Spirit can be subjective. Bible reading for change must begin with submission to the Spirit and an attitude of prayer to God for change in the reader. Foster notes, “The best guard against any handling of the Scripture that leaves our souls untouched — and ourselves unchanged — is surrender to the cleansing, forming flow of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ Green recognizes both the risk and the necessity of a Spirit led approach saying that, “a spirit-imbued reading of Scripture may appear to take risks when compared with those forms of modern, critical study wary of what might go wrong in the interpretive process. But this is a necessary risk, and our taking it is an expression of our trust in the Spirit ... to guide our interpretation”¹¹ It is also a recognition that power to change is not in the reader. Foster agrees that “*spiritual formation does not occur by direct human effort, but through a relational process whereby we receive from God the power or ability to do what we cannot do by our own effort.* We do not produce the outcome. That is God's business.”¹²

⁹ Strobel, *Metaphorma*, 39.

¹⁰ Foster and Helmers, *Life with God*, 62.

¹¹ Green, *Seized by Truth*, 62.

¹² Foster and Helmers, *Life with God*, 155.

The Church is also a change agent that works in conjunction with the Bible and the Holy Spirit. Some would refer to this as “tradition,” but in a broader sense, it includes the Church as expressed in the local setting, a cross-cultural setting (include both religious and secular culture), and a generational setting which considers the “traditions” of the ages. It is interesting that even the most ardent proponents of *sola scriptura* have no argument but the “tradition” of the Church to affirm the contents of the canon and the affirmation that the canon is closed.¹³ Perhaps, the most important function of the Church is to guard against the biased lens with which the reader views Scripture. This function is best served when using the broader sense of the Church as noted above.

In addition, the whole process of transformation best takes place in the context of community. The New Testament has no concept of a Christian in isolation. The Christian life is lived in community. Foster identifies both when he writes:

Reading the Bible with others does not mean only that we read together in a small group, or that we read commentaries to benefit from the wisdom of great teachers, or that we listen to the Bible read and reflected on in worship or other gatherings. It also means reading the Bible through the lens of others' experiences, in the knowledge of others' stories, in the midst of immersion in others' lives.¹⁴

Green puts it this way, “The Church historic and global is our conversation partner in the hermeneutical task. Interpreters who are manifestly ‘not like us’ can assist us in hearing those melodies in Scripture for which we would otherwise have no ear.”¹⁵ The Church works together with the Holy Spirit and the Bible to effectuate transformation. It also

¹³ Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, Location 185.

¹⁴ Foster and Helmers, *Life with God*, 105.

¹⁵ Green, *Seized by Truth*, 79.

serves to help the individual believer to avoid self-deception in both interpretation and experience.

The interaction of the personal response of the recipient is also an important factor in the transformation process. God generally does not force transformation upon the Christian. He looks for willing participants. Green writes: “With respect to reading the Bible as Scripture, I have urged, rather, that no amount of linguistic training or level of expertise in historical and textual analysis can supersede the more essential ‘preparation’ entailed in such dispositions and postures as acceptance, devotion, attention, and trust.”¹⁶ Foster also recognizes the importance of the attitude of the reader:

If we want to receive from the Bible the life “with God” that is portrayed in the Bible, we must be prepared to have our dearest and most fundamental assumptions about ourselves and our associations called into question. We must read humbly and in a constant attitude of repentance.... Can we surrender freely to the life we see in the Bible, or must we remain in control of that life, only selectively endorsing it so far as we find it proper and safe from our “perspective”? Can we trust the living water that flows from Christ through the Bible, open ourselves to it and open it up into the world as best we can, and then get out of its way? This is the goal of reading the Bible for spiritual transformation.¹⁷

The attitude required is not just minimal commitment. Peterson expresses it in terms of the full involvement of the reader in his metaphor of eating by saying that “words to be freely taken in, tasted, chewed, savored, swallowed, and digested, have a very different effect on us from those that come at us from the outside, whether in the form of propaganda or information.”¹⁸ Ricoeur goes further to attach the attitude of the

¹⁶ Green, *Seized by Truth*, 65.

¹⁷ Foster and Helmers, *Life with God*, 5–7.

¹⁸ Peterson, *Eat this Book*, 10.

reader to the hermeneutical process. He asserts that an attitude of faith requires accepting the act of “being interpreted at the same time that he or she interprets the world of the text. Such is the hermeneutical constitution of the biblical faith.”¹⁹ The importance of the full cooperation of the reader in the transformative process is such that it must be considered a change agent along with the Bible, the Spirit, and the community of believers.

The role of the Bible in spiritual transformation is clear. Its nature is such that it has the authority, power, and purpose to effectuate change which transforms the totality of man’s being. It is a process in which the Bible’s nature as change-agent works in conjunction with the other agents of the Spirit, the community of believers, and the cooperation of the reader. Just as the relationship of the Bible to other change agents is important, so also is the relationship of the discipline of transformational Bible reading to other spiritual disciplines. That relationship will be discussed next.

The Relationship of Transformational Bible Reading to Other Spiritual Disciplines

Transformational Bible reading is a spiritual discipline that exists in conjunction with other spiritual disciplines. Foster defines a spiritual discipline as “an intentionally directed action by which we do what we can do in order to receive from God the ability (or power) to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”²⁰ He lists twelve disciplines broken into categories of inward, outward, and corporate focuses.²¹ There are differing opinions

¹⁹ Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 46.

²⁰ Foster and Helmers, *Life with God*, 16.

²¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, v.

on what should be included in a list of spiritual disciplines, but as Kenneth Boa notes, all agree that they are crucial to the pursuit of God, and are not optional practices in pursuing spiritual formation.²² When this concept of spiritual disciplines is considered, it must then be understood that the Bible is to be utilized in relationship to other change agents. What is different is that the importance of the relationship of transformational Bible reading to the other disciplines is primarily about its connection to the concept of disciplines as a whole rather than to any individual discipline. The discipline of transformational Bible reading is impacted by the other disciplines as a whole, and this in turn affects the other disciplines.

The significance of the disciplines as a whole is primarily a practical issue, and is related to the whole idea of spiritual transformation, and in particular the human part in that process. As was explained in Chapter 3, Christians cannot produce spiritual transformation. They participate in the process, but it is God who brings about the change. From an evangelical standpoint, it is important to assert that the spiritual disciplines are not a path of works to salvation or to the favor of God. Foster sees this in terms of God's grace. The disciplines have no merit, righteousness, or rectitude in themselves. Their only purpose is to place us before God and then the grace of God steps in.²³ From a human standpoint, and for the purpose of teaching at Horizon, the importance is that discipline of any kind does not stand alone. Disciplined people tend to be disciplined in all areas. The same principle applies to undisciplined people. Discipline

²² Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 77.

²³ Foster and Helmers, *Life with God*, 17–18.

begets discipline. Therefore, success in practicing any of the spiritual disciplines will lend itself to success in the other disciplines. This does not mean that the believer must commit to every discipline on anyone's list. It does mean that commitment to multiple disciplines is helpful.²⁴

The impact of transformational Bible reading on the other disciplines is related even more to God's action in the process. First, from a theological standpoint, the Bible is a foundational element of every discipline. Any discipline that does not have a biblical foundation is suspect. Consistently, although lists of spiritual disciplines may word it differently, they position Bible reading and prayer prominently. Foster for example includes meditation, prayer, and study (i.e. Bible study) in the inward disciplines.²⁵ Willard puts study and prayer as disciplines of engagement.²⁶ Every discipline either incorporates the Bible directly in its practice, or uses biblical principles to guide the practice. It can be argued that all other disciplines flow out of the discipline of Bible reading and prayer. They form one's relationship with God and all else comes out of that relationship. It is also true that the disciplines help us to read the Bible because every discipline brings us full circle back to the Bible. Just as the Bible is an essential part of every discipline, every discipline based on the Bible will work with it to change us.

In order to formulate a strategy to introduce transformational Bible reading at Horizon, several foundational principles have been outlined. The essential truths, or

²⁴ These comments are based on my observation of those people whom I would consider disciplined persons, and my own experience as a generally undisciplined individual. When I have had success, it has been with discipline in multiple areas, and not just with one isolated issue.

²⁵ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, v.

²⁶ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 158.

elements, of spiritual formation have been described: the necessity, the progressive nature and the source (God). The relationship of the Bible to the other change agents including the Holy Spirit, the Church, and personal response has been defined. Finally, the relationship of transformational Bible study to other spiritual disciplines has been appraised. A discussion of which methods of ancient and modern Bible reading and prayer would most be profitable within an evangelical culture will come next.

CHAPTER 5

METHODS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL BIBLE TEACHING

The concept of transformational Bible reading may be new as introduced at Horizon. However, the concept is not new, even though the term may be unfamiliar. There have been Christians practicing this technique since the early days of the Church. In introducing the practice to Horizon, the best methodology will incorporate the ancient methods with consideration given to modern evangelical culture and historical evangelical practices. Additionally, special attention will be given to how modern technology may allow a return to the historical oral and auditory approach to Bible reading which was important within the ancient practice.

Ancient Practices and Modern Evangelical Approaches

In today's Christian culture, it is an almost universal axiom that daily Bible reading and prayer are an essential part of spiritual life. Certainly, within my own conservative evangelical Christian culture, daily Bible reading and prayer are the beginning points of any beginning teaching on discipleship. The general teaching is that one cannot be a good Christian, nor grow spiritually, without this practice. The irony is that this practice, which is considered a non-negotiable part of Christian spirituality, was

not even possible until several hundred years ago. Prior to the invention of the printing press and the industrial revolution which allowed mass printing and distribution of Bibles, the average Christian did not own a Bible, and even then, literacy was reserved for the privileged few. This explains in part the emphasis of liturgy and the oral nature of Bible reading. The oral repetition of the liturgy aided the process of memorization and in that way enabled the common Christian to carry at least a portion the Scripture home for use beyond the group setting.

It may seem unreasonable, that a practice which was not possible for most Christians until relatively recently, could be essential to Christian life. While there should be caution in making a dogmatic statement, the simple answer would be to look to the words of Jesus in Luke 12:48, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required.” The average Christian has access to many more resources today than the monastics of hundreds of years ago. The Scripture cited would indicate, therefore, that the modern Christian should be accountable to make use of those resources which are readily available.

Ancient Practices

The predominant methodology for transformational Bible reading throughout most of Church history has been *lectio divina*. Origen is generally credited with first using the term, while St. Benedict instituted the practice as a prescribed rule within the monastic realm.¹ However, Benedict only prescribed the practice in his Rule, he did not

¹ Benner, *Opening to God*, 47.

describe it.² Benner correctly asserts that *lectio divina* is not a technique, procedure, or method. It is an approach and an expectation that God will be encountered in reading the text.³ The approach and expectation are critical, but the manner itself, as generally practiced, also holds considerable value.

The method of *lectio divina*, as commonly observed, was not outlined until the twelfth century by Guigo II in *The Ladder of Monks*.⁴ He described four rungs in climbing the ladder that will achieve the goal. He writes: “It has few rungs, yet its length is immense and wonderful, for its lower end rests upon the earth, but its top pierces the clouds and touches heavenly secrets.”⁵ The four parts of *lectio divina* which he outlined are *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). Robertson describes the combination of Guigo II’s didactic outline and Bernard of Clairvaux’s exhaustive exploration of its possibilities as reaching a terminus in the development of *lectio divina* as a reading culture.⁶ The four movements are consistent with the purposes of transformational Bible reading. Therefore, since the method has been practiced and tested over time, it will serve as a key element for the strategy as presented in this paper.

The second major historical approach to transformational Bible reading is found in The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola. His teachings were approved by

² Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1996), 3–4.

³ Benner, *Opening to God*, 48.

⁴ Guigo II, Edmund Colledge, and James Walsh, *The Ladder of Monks: A Letter on the Contemplative Life and Twelve Meditations* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 25–35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶ Robertson, *Lectio Divina*, Location 202.

Pope Paul III in 1548.⁷ While the approach of Ignatius does not call for pondering scriptural passages as explicitly as *lectio divina*, the contemplation of the Gospel message is a central element to The Spiritual Exercises. Joseph Tetlow notes that a brief outline of the events of the Gospel to be used in contemplation was included by Ignatius since the Bible was not readily available to all at that time. Tetlow observes, however, that this outline is rarely used today due to the ready accessibility of the Bible to the most people.⁸ Even a simple search of the internet will show that the use of Scripture itself, rather than Ignatius' gospel outline, is integral to the practice of Ignatian prayer today. A few examples, which demonstrate the use of Scripture in the Ignatian practice today, are found on the websites of such diverse organizations as the Loyola Press, and the UK Navigators.⁹

There is considerable value in the Spiritual Exercises, whether it is the use of the full retreat, Annotation 19, or the Prayer of Examen. However, for the purposes of this project, the primary contribution of Ignatius is the encouragement of the use of imagination. James Wakefield captures the essence of Ignatian imagination this way: “Ignatius invites us into the story of Jesus and calls us to be transformed by our participation in the story. With our imagination and reason, with our five bodily senses,

⁷ Joseph Tetlow, *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola: With Commentary* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co, 2009), 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹ Loyola Press, “Praying the Ignatian Way,” <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-what-how-why-of-prayer/praying-with-Scripture/> accessed July 18, 2012); IgnatianSpirituality.com, “Praying with Scripture,” <http://www.loyolapress.com/praying-the-ignatian-way-reflective-prayer.htm> (accessed July 18, 2012); The Navigators UK, “Lectio Divina and Ignatian Meditation,” <http://www.navigators.co.uk/prayer-resources/Lectio-Divina-and-Ignatian-Meditation.doc> (accessed 7/18/12).

and especially with our emotions, we become secondhand witnesses of the events of Scripture.”¹⁰ This concept integrates well with the practice of *lectio divina*. It is especially true in the meditation phase. Jan Johnson devotes a full chapter of her book, *Savoring God’s Word*, to the use of a “sanctified imagination” outlining the practical use in addition to addressing hindrances and objections to such use.¹¹

Both *lectio divina* and Ignatian prayer fit within the broad category of mysticism. The mystical element cannot be completely when speaking on the human interaction with the Bible and Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit may take place in ways that cannot be discerned with the rational mind or with the physical senses. It is natural that the imagination would be part of this work. Evangelicals tend to be skeptical of mystics and mystical experiences. Benner allays some of these fears by reporting that “the mystics themselves repeatedly warn about the dangers of seeking ecstatic or mystical experience A mystic is simply a person who seeks, above all else, to know God in love. Mystics are, therefore, much more defined by their longing than by their experience.”¹² He continues to explain that mystical contemplation can result in a sort of knowing that is beyond reason, not an irrational knowing, but transrational such that gives potential for healing the rift between heart and head, not something an individual can accomplish but

¹⁰ James L. Wakefield and Ignatius, *Sacred Listening: Discovering the Spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 118–121.

¹¹ Jan Johnson, *Savoring God’s Word: Cultivating the Soul-Transforming Practice of Scripture Meditation* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 109–131.

¹² David Benner, *Spirituality and the Awakening Self: The Sacred Journey of Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1580–1589.

can cultivate in contemplation.¹³ Evangelicals, on the other hand, have traditionally emphasized the rational and at times have even discounted the nonrational. This does not have to be the case.

Modern Evangelical Approaches

The most commonly used term that comes closest to an approach of transformative Bible reading for evangelicals is “quiet time.” As has been acknowledged previously, the call and expectation is that a regular practice of praying and reading the Bible is a normative part of Christian life. The problem has been that the practice is not frequently carried out, and when it is, the emphasis is heavily tilted toward a rational approach that would virtually eliminate the benefits of the traditional approaches of *lectio divina* and the use of imagination. Alister McGrath points out that the result of the influence of rationalism upon Protestantism is the loss of the emotional involvement with Scripture which was expressed in the writings of Puritans such as Jonathan Edwards and Pietists such as the Wesley brothers.¹⁴ Prior to the influence of the Enlightenment and modernism, Luther asserted the premise of *totus homo* which includes the non-rational parts of the human personality.¹⁵ Luther’s assessment is consistent with the elements of spiritual transformation as defined previously in that it must include the whole person.

Much of the evangelical concept of quiet time is built on the traditional spiritual emphasis of knowledge (correct doctrine) and volition (correct decision or action).

¹³ Benner, *Spirituality and the Awakening Self*, Location 1589–1692.

¹⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Beyond the Quiet Time: Practical Evangelical Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 20.

¹⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1985), 182.

McGrath correctly asserts that the Christian life has both objective and subjective aspects. Although the truths about God are objective and of essential importance, there is also a subjective side. As Christians, we must be both informed and transformed.¹⁶ I can remember hearing many messages early in my Christian walk stressing that we as believers needed not only head knowledge, but also needed heart knowledge. My understanding of the generally accepted meaning of this message was that heart knowledge did not refer to any kind of emotion, but rather it meant that the heart was the place of volition. The decision made there would result in action.

Memorization of Scripture was stressed, but meditation was a foreign concept. One of the early books, which I read, taught how to read the Bible, and included reading it prayerfully, but the emphasis of the prayer was to rationally and correctly understand it and then to apply it.¹⁷ The common theme, in the literature to which I was exposed, was that the purpose of prayer, in conjunction with Bible reading, was for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit that would ensure correct understanding. This in turn would lead the reader to correct doctrine, and then it would aid the reader in responding volitionally to engage in correct action.

Howard presents a compelling argument that the principles of *lectio divina* can be found in evangelical tradition.¹⁸ In his article on the topic, he gives numerous examples of the elements of *lectio divina* as found in evangelical literature in its essence, if not in

¹⁶ McGrath, *Beyond the Quiet Time*, 16.

¹⁷ G. Christian Weiss, *On Being a Real Christian* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1951), 52–57.

¹⁸ Evan Howard, “Lectio Divina in the Evangelical Tradition,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 56–77.

its articulated form. He recognizes that the contemplative component is probably the most problematic within the evangelical tradition due to its ascetical or mystical orientation.¹⁹ Howard also notes the negative impact of modernism.

With the threat of modernism, interest in the Scriptures increasingly became focused on right belief. The influence of empirical approaches to the Scriptures led to an increasing attention to the clarification of meaning through observable facts.... Consequently, Bible study became increasingly *that*: a matter of study. Evangelical seminaries today train their pastoral candidates in the rigors of biblical exegesis. For the most part they are not taught devotional Bible reading
.....²⁰

Despite this concern, he concludes that *lectio divina* is not antithetical to evangelicalism, but rather, is consistent with the traditional principles of devotional Bible reading. Even Packer recognizes that contemplation and meditation are not without precedent in the evangelical tradition when he traces their usage in the works of John Owen, and Richard Baxter, among others.²¹

Holloman defends the importance of biblical knowledge as a prerequisite to spiritual transformation. Although he overemphasizes the knowledge element, his assessment of the three practices needed for spiritual growth is an excellent presentation of the traditional evangelical approach. He presents a valuable practice as he writes: “The most effective practices for spiritual growth are as follows: First, memorize Scripture or acquire biblical knowledge Secondly, meditate upon Scripture or consider the meaning and application of biblical knowledge Thirdly, model Scripture or

¹⁹ Howard, “Lectio Divina in the Evangelical Tradition”, 74.

²⁰ Ibid., 77.

²¹ J.I. Packer, “The Bible in Use”, Location 1018.

implement biblical knowledge in actual Christian living . . .”²² Paul asserts this same principle when he writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

The ancient methods of transformational Bible reading, particularly *lectio divina*, are consistent with the essential truths of spiritual transformation and with the relationship of the Bible to other change agents. While they may be antithetical to the fundamentalist evangelicalism of the first half of the twentieth century, the same is not true for the whole of evangelical history. The burden of the strategy for the introduction of transformational Bible reading is not to rewrite evangelical theology, but rather to further encourage movement away from an overemphasis on rational knowledge and propositional truth to the exclusion of all else.

Oral Reading in the Ancient Practice of Bible Reading

One of the distinctive factors of the ancient practice of Bible reading is that it was consistently read aloud prior to the later twelfth century. Even the monks, who read individually, read aloud. There is a clear biblical precedent for this practice. The word of the Lord that came to Joshua was that “this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then

²² Henry Holloman, “A Proposed Model for the Proper Relationship between Biblical Knowledge and Spiritual Growth,” (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, La Mirada, CA, November 21, 1985), 5.

you will have success” (Js 1:8). The current culture tends to be so reading centered that it is easy to gloss over the concept of the “word in our mouths” expressed here and in other biblical passages (Dt 30:14, Rom 10:8).

Ricoeur also speaks about the relationship of the “sacred” text and the community. He notes that in a sense there is no sacred text in Christianity, because it is not the text that is sacred but the One about whom it speaks. He sees this in contrast to the Q’uran, for instance, which is sacred in Arabic but not in a translation. The Bible is not “sacred in the sense that you have no right to touch and change it.”²³ As he said earlier, there is a polarization between proclamation and manifestation. He sees the emphasis on the oral as a desacralization as he writes:

I wonder whether it does not belong to the nature of proclamation to be always brought back from the written to the oral; and it is the function of preaching to reverse the relation from written to spoken. In that sense preaching is more fundamental to Hebrew and Christian tradition because of the nature of the text that has to be reconverted to word, in contrast with Scripture; and therefore it is a kind of desacralization of the written as such, by the return to the spoken word.²⁴

Even with this began to change beginning as early as the twelfth century, there is no doubt that up until sometime after the invention of the printing press, the average Christian “heard” rather than “read” the Word. *Lectio divina* was originally practiced in community, and most of the community received the Word only through oral presentation. While those in a non-liturgical setting still “hear” the word as part of preaching, this aspect of a focused community participation in “hearing” is lacking.

²³Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 68

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 71

Peterson says that “Reading is always preceded by hearing and speaking. Language is essentially oral.”²⁵

Liturgy should be emphasized because it “preserves and presents the Holy Scriptures in the context of the worshiping and obeying community of Christians, who are at the center of everything God has done, is doing, and will do. The liturgy won't let us go off alone with our Bibles, or self-select a few friends for Bible study and let it go at that.”²⁶ Communal reading of the Bible is oral by necessity. Although the widespread availability of the Bible in print is of great advantage in making it accessible to the masses, it may be that something has been lost in moving away from the oral element. Daniel Block argues that the evangelical church needs to recover oral reading of Scripture, especially in the communal worship context. He further notes the contradiction between doctrine and practice as he writes that “in spite of creedal affirmations of high views of Scripture, the relative absence of Bible reading is one of the marks of contemporary evangelical worship and symptomatic of a very low view of Scripture.”²⁷ An examination of the history of oral reading and the effect of technology will provide some insight into ways to recapture the benefits of oral reading.

The Effect of Technological Change

Ivan Illich in his commentary on Hugh's *Didascalicon* observes a significant shift in the twelfth century from oral reading of Scripture to silent reading. In addition to the

²⁵ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 92.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁷ Daniel Block, “‘That They May Hear’: Biblical Foundations for the Oral Reading of Scripture in Worship,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 18.

use of paper which allowed books to be bound, there was the discovery of the ability to use the alphabet as an organizational tool. Prior to that, reading could only practically be done in a linear fashion. With the use of alphabetical organization, the reader could much more quickly move to a specific portion of the text. This allowed compilations of texts and portions of texts. It changed the way that books were read.²⁸ It is probably not coincidence that this coincided with the decline of *lectio divina*.²⁹ It was much easier to look for information and not just work through the text as it was written. There was a change from perceiving the text through hearing to perceiving the text through seeing.³⁰

Illich sees this visual reading approach lasting without change until the 1980's. He writes: "Once these tools are invented, they remained fundamentally unchanged until the text composer program of the 1980s. A mutation of comparable depth begins only then."³¹ There has been another significant shift in the time since then. Access to computers, and to the internet, along with the ability to print personally, has changed the whole dynamic of the spread of information. Churches struggle to get people to bring their Bibles to services because the text is always displayed on a screen. Software that can search the Bible, not only in the reader's native language, but in the original Greek and Hebrew, is readily available. This shift in how information is accessed is almost certainly to have an effect on how the Bible is read for transformation.

²⁸ Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text : A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon*, ed. Illich Ivan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 95–96.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁰ The irony is that this occurred contemporaneously with Gugio II's clear exposition of the steps of *lectio divina*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

At first glance, it appears that reading the Bible on a computer screen would make contemplation even less likely. This may be true initially, but technology gives opportunity for contemplation in other ways. Sven Birkerts points out that where print media seems to fix words in permanence, the electronic form changes the words from the object to a “signal, a means to an end.”³² This idea returns to a concept that is more consistent with an oral text than with a written one. In addition, the electronic form has shifted control of the text from the few to the many. While there may be dangers of corruption in this, there is also the advantage of obtaining input from the wide community of the Church. No longer can those in positions of power shield the reader from other sources of information.

For the specific purpose of transformational reading, the advent of media players offers a great advantage. Options are available that provide both the visual and auditory presentation of Scripture. For those who have been raised with the print media to the extent that “hearing” the word is virtually non-existent, it is a new day. I have found that resistance to the idea of *lectio divina* diminishes when a reading, complete with background music or sounds allowing space for each phase, is provided for the participant. Modern technology gives additional options. It may be that where the advent of the printing press decreased the oral aspect of Scripture, the latest technological change will increase it. The MP3 player may be the prayer closet of the twenty-first century.

³² Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1994), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 284–287.

Robert Fowler notes that the Reformation was a child of the technology of the printing press.³³ It is possible that the technological changes of today will have equal impact. If the Church does not use the technology of today to proclaim the ancient message of the gospel, another message will win the day. Even as Christians desire to read a text that is thousands of years old in a way that will transform us, the Church must consider what is happening now. There is extensive access to computer software that allows searching through the Bible to find all the references for any word. There is instant access to the Greek and Hebrew sources for the English word. There are commentaries, word studies, dictionaries, etc. readily available through technology.

All this is a tremendous asset for gaining Bible knowledge and for the hermeneutic process. At the same, it may actually hinder transformational Bible reading. Everything is instantly available. Therefore, the text is not pondered or read through consecutively. There is no ancient scroll that requires reading sequentially and slowly. The reader can research a word in the text in an instant, but cannot contemplate the text in an instant. The purpose then must be to find ways to use the technology of the current age to aid approaching the Bible in a transformational manner, and not just one that is informational. The Church must learn to embrace the technology in order to accomplish the ancient purpose of spiritual growth. It must realize that that this is a process and not found in an instant as is characterized by a computerized search.

The ancient practice of *lectio divina*, with consideration given to Ignatian prayer, has been shown to be the most effective and time proven method for transformational

³³ Robert M. Fowler, Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer, and Fernando F. Segovia, *New Paradigms for Bible Study: The Bible in the Third Millennium* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 25.

Bible reading. Although its origins are in Catholicism and that is where the practice was primarily practiced until recently, it is not inconsistent with evangelical values and theology. Modern technology has brought about the opportunity to implement once again the oral and auditory nature of *lectio divina* that contributes to its effectiveness. These factors will all be considered in moving forward to design an introductory study for transformational Bible reading.

PART THREE

DESIGNING, IMPLEMENTING, AND EVALUATING THE STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

DESIGNING THE INTRODUCTORY STUDY

Once the nature and role of the Bible in spiritual transformation has been established, consideration must be given to the practical participation of the individual and the church community in the process. Much of the practical design was based on prior experience with church-wide small groups in conjunction with the elements explored up to this point. Although leadership development and training has not been a focus of this paper, it is nevertheless an important part of the process. Furthermore, development of a small-group leader and teacher training course served as an antecedent in the development of the project described in this thesis. Therefore, this chapter will begin with an explanation of leader training which was developed prior to the creation of the small-group study. Next, there will be a discussion of the issues which were considered and addressed in the development of the study. This will be followed by an explanation of the implementation plan for the study. The content of the material which was used in the study will be outlined. The chapter also will discuss the format and style design used for the study booklet as well as development of supportive resource aids. These aids were designed to

incorporate the use of modern technology in a way that would facilitate the use of ancient methods. In all portions there will be either implicit or explicit consideration given to impediments to acceptance and to other factors which could affect the development. Finally, attention will be given to the means of evaluation of the introductory study.

Leader Training

Training of leaders is an essential part of any church emphasis or program. An emphasis, program, or especially an attempt at culture change is unlikely to be successful without the buy-in and training of leaders. In anticipation of that need, work was done to form a curriculum which could be used to train small-group leaders. The idea that the Bible should be approached and read with a view to spiritual transformation was the major emphasis of the training. The training was initially designed as a two-part study. The first part focused on establishing the value and principles of transformational Bible reading. The second part focused on the tools and skills needed in the instruction process.

The primary purpose of the first part of this training for Bible teachers was to create a mindset that spiritual transformation is the goal of Bible study and teaching; and also to formulate a framework of understanding that is conducive to that goal. The materials prepared for this part included both a student manual and an instructor manual. The intent was to have materials to guide an instructor, other than myself, in teaching the class at Horizon. The instructor manuals included the student manual with additional guidance in how to present the material and stimulate group interaction. Mulholland's *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, an excellent presentation of the necessary change in approach to Scripture, was used as a primary

resource. In the pilot class, the book was used as a supplemental text. Based on that experience and an evaluation of student feedback, it has been incorporated into the actual lessons for future use.

The study consisted of seven sessions. The first two sessions defined and presented the biblical and theological foundation for transformational Bible study including the assertions that: Spiritual transformation is a necessary and integral part of the Christian life. Spiritual transformation occurs both gradually and instantaneously; We as believers cannot transform ourselves or others, but we can be partners with God in facilitating transformation; Transformation involves the whole person; And, the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is a primary source of spiritual transformation. Sessions three through seven explored the holistic nature of transformation including a session for each of the areas of a person's being including intellect, emotions, behavior, relationships, and spirit. The final session included a discussion of meditative approaches to Bible reading and the presentation of a sample *lectio divina* exercise. Much of the material from the pilot class for leaders is incorporated into the introductory small-group study.

The first part of the pilot class also included time for interaction with the concepts introduced, and a discussion of the practical application of the concepts by the teacher/leader of a small group. The following statement in the introduction to the instructor manual addresses the tension between conveying information and soliciting group interaction:

Your teaching/facilitating will set an example for their study and teaching. Although there is some lecture (information giving), especially in the first lesson, you should always approach the class with an expectation of interaction. I suggest

an approach that is a hybrid between a small group discussion and a classroom setting. It is not as formal as a class room, but must be kept structured to cover the material. It is a balance between information/formation.

It is somewhat of a paradox that the introduction of concepts that would challenge and change the informational mindset requires a substantial degree of informational presentation.

In the second part of the pilot class, the structure was much more experimental and sought to explore how a person with minimal teaching and hermeneutical training could best be introduced to more advanced study which would aid in teaching the Bible to others. The class did not focus directly on the principles of transformational Bible reading, but rather upon the general tools and skills for teaching the Bible or facilitating Bible study in a small group. While this part of the training may not be specific to transformational Bible reading, the tools and skills are essential for the leaders and teachers who will be effectuating its principles in the church. The class looked at teaching in terms of preparation and presentation. In regards to preparation, the students were given exposure to a wide range of Bible study resources and introduced to principles of interpretation. Instruction about presentation focused on teaching techniques and skills, the principles of inductive Bible study with an emphasis on the groups setting, and the use of personal creativity in the teaching process. The principles of inductive Bible study are particularly consistent with the concept of transformational Bible reading.

The development of the material suggested in the second part is an ongoing process. One of the observations I reported in the paper describing the class was the need for extensive student interaction. I wrote:

The importance of hands-on exercises cannot be overemphasized. The students cannot simply be told how to perform a task of teaching. They must have the opportunity to put it into practice. The students unanimously saw the limited practical exercises in the class as one of its most valuable aspects. While some of this response may have been due to increased interest and enjoyment of these activities, it is also clear that they need to “do”, as well as “hear”, and even “see” in order to fully grasp and assimilate the lessons.

Leadership training in all aspects of the instruction/leadership role is an important part of any strategy in the church. Therefore, the leadership training component of the strategy to continue encouragement of transformational Bible reading will be presented as part of the overall plans for future development explained in Chapter 7.

Considerations for Development of an Introductory Study

A plan for study introducing and encouraging transformational Bible reading at Horizon must include a concern for barriers to acceptance, transmission of the essential truths of spiritual transformation, and practical training in actual transformational Bible reading. The study must provide a theological basis for what the congregant is being asked to do. Since Horizon as a whole includes many people who do not have an extensive theological background, they must be provided teaching which will explain the reasons for participating in the practice of transformational Bible reading. There also must be an explanation of why this approach may be different than what they have been exposed to previously. All of this must be provided in language that is clear and understandable to the average lay person. The information and practice provided in each lesson must build sequentially upon the prior one.

The second necessary component of the plan must address the need to provide for a culture change within Horizon that will result in a community expectation of

transformational Bible reading. This clearly cannot be achieved with a one-time emphasis, but the seeds of change can be planted. A study done within the ongoing small group setting reinforces the community aspect of the practice. Additional reinforcement can be achieved if the study is in coordination with a sermon series. The cooperation of the senior pastor and his enthusiasm for the series will be important to beginning cultural change. That cooperation and enthusiasm was secured early in the process of this project. Of course, this is an area where future planning will be critical to a strategy that is more than an introductory effort at culture change.

The third component of the study must be practical training in the actual practice of transformational Bible reading. The congregant must be given more than theory. There must be opportunity to actually do what they are being taught, and tools must be provided which will give them assistance in the practice. The plan should include opportunity to practice transformational Bible reading in the group setting and also in an individual setting. As much as is possible in an introductory study, this will include multiple opportunities to experience and practice the process.

Learning theory and the variety of learning styles among individual people also must be considered. Since the study is primarily an introduction, it is not practical to provide a complete learning track for different learning styles. However, the fact that not everyone learns in the same way must be recognized. More consideration to this will be given in the training of small group leaders and teachers.

The principles of learning theory also are helpful in designing the study. Secular educator and author Patricia Cranton is surprisingly pertinent to and consistent with the Christian learning process both in her understanding of transformation and important

aspects of the learning process.¹ She quotes Robert Boyd who defines adult transformation as, “a fundamental change in one’s personality involving conjointly the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration.”² John Dirkx points out a principle consistent with *lectio divina* when he writes: “Transformative learning involves imaginative and emotional ways of knowing....”³

Cranton contributes to the understanding necessary in designing a study in that “learner empowerment is both a goal of and a condition for transformative learning.”⁴ The learner is not just learning a set of propositions or facts. Instead as Cranton asserts, “Reflection is a key concept in transformative learning theory.” Transformation involves much more than the absorption of facts. Recognition of the need to consider a variety of learning styles is not limited to secular authors. Several Christian authors including Marlene D. LeFever and Barbara Bruce have written about the need to consider different learning styles in teaching within the Church.⁵

Personality types not only affect the way in which one learns but also the way in which one prays. Peace links the four primary Myers-Briggs personality types to

¹ Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

² Robert Boyd, “Facilitating Personal Transformation in Small Groups,” *Small Group Behavior* 20, no. 4 (1989): 459.

³ Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, 50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵ Marlene D. LeFever, *Learning Style: Reaching Everyone God Gave You to Teach* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1995); Barbara Bruce, *7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Adults: Using Our Multiple Intelligences to Build Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

Ignatian, Augustinian, Franciscan, and Thomistic prayers, but sees Benedictine prayer (*lectio divina*) applying to all temperaments.⁶ Charles Keating goes even further to relate styles of prayer to all sixteen Myers-Briggs temperaments.⁷ An understanding of these styles can be helpful but concept also could be overly imposing upon the beginning student. This is an area that should be considered in developing a study but, due to the complexity, mostly left for exploration in the ongoing promotion of transformational Bible reading.

Finally, the study content and design must be consistent with the goal of spiritual transformation. This means that the material cannot simply consist of a rhetorical listing of propositional truth which is to be memorized by the student. The assumption is that for a study to achieve a transformational purpose it must engage the learner in active participation. Jim Wilhoit and Leland Ryken call this active learning. They do not see it necessarily as outward activity, but rather as “educational experiences that engage students and prompt them to wrestle with information, test its validity, find ways of using what is learned, and relate or adapt it to previously learned material.”⁸

Practical Design

The practical design of the introductory material consisted of three basic elements. The first determination was how the study would be implemented and how it

⁶ Richard Peace, *Meditative Prayer: Entering God's Presence* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998), 87–95.

⁷ Charles J. Keating, *Who We Are Is How We Pray: Matching Personality and Spirituality* (Mystic, CN: Twenty-third Publications, 1987).

⁸ Jim Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 56.

would be integrated with the overall church program. The second element consisted of the actual teaching material. The third component was formatting of the study guide to be used and consideration for any supplemental materials.

Implementation and Integration of the Study

The study was implemented during the first few months of 2009. In addressing the first element of the design, it was determined, in cooperation with Horizon's senior pastor, that the study would be coordinated with a sermon series. This coordination emphasized the importance of the study and provided opportunity for reinforcement of the critical idea. The Sunday sermon was used to introduce the basic ideas that would be integral to the small-group study for the week which followed.

All small groups at Horizon were expected to participate in the study. This resulted in twenty-one groups taking part, comprising more than 150 adult participants. Unfortunately, only two of the group leaders had participated in pilot leader training. The study was introduced to group leaders at a regularly scheduled leader meeting. They were not given specific training, but were provided a brief outline of the study and the process involved. They were advised that the leader manual would provide them guidance for presenting the material to their group.

The methodology was that the materials developed for the small group study guide were given to the senior pastor in advance. He then used the material as a basis for the sermon preceding each week's lesson. The sermon was intended to be both instructional and motivational. He followed his usual practice and prepared notes which were given out to the congregation at the time of the sermon. His message was an

emphasis of the major points of the study for the coming week but did not follow it so closely that the material presented to the small groups became simply redundant. Of course, his sermon reflected his personality and also his particular points of emphasis. Part of the intent was that the sermon would also serve as an appetizer that would stimulate a desire to learn more in the small groups. Although not specifically included in or addressed in the study material, it was understood that the Sunday sermon would be likely to generate part of the discussion in the small groups. This was considered an asset and not a liability.

The senior pastor's schedule was such that it was determined that I would deliver the sermon prior to the week five lesson. I felt this was significant in that week five included the introduction of the concept of combining reading with prayer and also the introduction of *lectio divina*. Therefore, I was able to fully use the sermon to prepare and motivate the congregation for introduction to the new practice which they would experience in the coming week. The heart of the project was the preparation and implementation of the small-group study in coordination with the sermon series.

The Content of the Study

The content of the small-group study was based on the foundational ideas and issues covered above in Chapters 3 through 5 and the considerations presented earlier in this chapter. The first three sessions of the study began by emphasizing the need for transformation. The intent of the study was to be both informational and formational. Within the context at Horizon, a substantial informational aspect was needed to undergird the formational aspect. Understanding that change is not an optional part of the Christian

life was a critical foundation for the participant's reception of the rest of the material. Next, the study explained the expectation of a holistic change. The whole of the Christian being was defined and an introduction to the pertinence of change in various areas was provided. The following lesson emphasized that God is the source of change, while introducing all the change agents, and then defining the Christian's part in the process.

After providing a foundation for what is to be accomplished, the next lesson introduced the idea of reading the Bible for transformation, rather than just for information, with consideration for how the current cultural bias affects the way an individual looks at the text. Building on the previous lesson, the fifth session presented the idea of integrating Bible reading with prayer and introduced the practice of *lectio divina*. The next two lessons focused on the two change agents which had not been explored so far in the study. The sixth lesson focused on the Holy Spirit while lesson seven related the role of the Church in the transformational process. Finally, the last session summarized the entire study, introduced the overall concept of spiritual disciplines, and then considered how the practice of these disciplines relates to the specific discipline of transformational Bible reading.

Format and Style

In designing the small group study and the accompanying booklet, the determination was made that it was not necessary to invent something that was particularly novel or different in the basic format from many of those study booklets currently being used. Most studies begin with some kind of ice-breaking or get-acquainted activity, followed by the main content, ending with questions, and then

application and prayer. This general outline is logical and has been successfully used over a number of years by many Christian small groups. Since there appeared to be no basis for modification, the basic format of the study was consistent with that model.

The study was named “Passport to Change”. This title was based on an analogy used by Strobel.⁹ The idea is based on the premise that spiritual transformation is a journey and that “conversion is the spiritual version of a passport . . . , but it is only if we take advantage of this portal that we can come to see the world in a new way.”¹⁰ This concept served as a theme throughout the study. The purpose of using the term and analogy was to form a learning connection and also to give students a point of reference outside of religious language. In the same way, although the participants were introduced to the term *lectio divina*, it was renamed “Read and Pray” or the acronym “RAP” for short. Although there is value in learning both the background and the traditional name, the acronym was easy to remember and more congruent to the casual nature of Horizon. This principle of using new terminology for old ideas was used, wherever possible, throughout the study.

Each lesson began a time called “Open Up,” consisting of questions ranging from light-hearted to serious, that would open up conversation and stimulate some reflection which would be compatible with the content of the lesson. Some of the questions such as, “As a gardener, do you have a green thumb, a yellow-green thumb, a black thumb of death, or no thumbs at all?” are only peripherally related to the material.¹¹ Others like

⁹ Strobel, *Metamorphosis*, 34.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See Appendix A, page 149.

“When was the last time you changed your mind about something? What caused you to change?” are directed at stimulating personal interaction with the thrust of the material.¹² In either case, the intent is also to facilitate an atmosphere of group interaction rather than an instructor presented lecture.

The next section included the main study material. While the option was given to provide the student guides to all group members in advance, my experience at Horizon has been that only a small percentage of a group actually study prior to the meeting. Therefore, the lessons were designed with the idea that they could be presented without advance study by the group members. Each lesson was intended to provide needed information and teaching, but also to be thought provoking. Next, the content included a series of questions designed to either reinforce the content of the lesson, challenge the participants to reflect on their understanding of the material, or challenge them to consider the personal impact of the lesson. The leader was advised that these questions could either be integrated with the lesson or could be held until after the lesson as they judged best for their group. The final section was a time of prayer and application. In addition to including quotes from various authors along with endnote references, several lessons also contained a list of books of recommended reading. This was intended to encourage more study by the participants.

The leader of each group was given an expanded study manual that included suggestions for guiding the group as well as some additional material which they could use according to their own judgment. They were instructed that the additional material was to give them background, or to expand their knowledge as leader, and it did not have

¹² See Appendix A, page 135.

to be presented to the group. Instructions to the leader encouraged them to engage the group interactively in the study. The general guidelines at the beginning of each lesson state that “most of the group time should be given to discussing the questions and wrestling with the concepts.” Although space does not allow inclusion of all the instructor notes, a few examples may be given. In lesson one, it is suggested that they ask and discuss, “How can we tell if someone has grown? What are our measuring sticks?” After the group practice of *lectio divina* in lesson five, they are instructed to ask the group to discuss their experience. This guidance is reiterated in lesson six after the recorded *lectio divina* experience as they are told to, “give opportunity for those in the group to share their experience.” There was an assumption made that the leaders understood that the lessons were intended to be interactive and not a lecture.

The student manual was designed to fit on half of a standard letter format page which was made into a booklet for each lesson. In the leader’s manual, the student page was then inset within a full standard letter size page. The leader’s notes were placed in the expanded marginal area. This enabled the leader to see the student page and the leader notes at the same time. Each student was provided a booklet along with additional instructional resources.

Instructional Resources

Several aids to the practical exercise of transformational Bible reading were provided with the study. These tools were designed to encourage and facilitate the individual practices of *lectio divina*. They included a small bookmark outlining the process of *lectio divina* on one side and the use of the Lord’s Prayer as a guide on the

other.¹³ A half-page card was given as a handout after the sermon introducing *lectio divina* that challenged the members in the congregation to practice it for five days during the following week.¹⁴ In one lesson, a prerecorded audio recording was used to guide the group through an exercise in *lectio divina*.¹⁵ This particular aid was important to the process of teaching *lectio divina* and also to the introduction of the use of modern technology as a means of facilitating the practice. The recording included instruction as well as a reading of the Scripture. Background music was used within the recording to allow time for each of the four movements. In some prior experiments with recordings, I had used instrumental music from Christian hymns and choruses. Participants found that the music was distracting if they were familiar with the words. They reported that their focus would shift from the Scripture reading to the hymn or chorus. With that in mind, I used classical music and other “mood” type music that would not have the distraction of mental recollection of familiar lyrics.

The implementation strategy, the content of the small-group study, the format and style of the study and the additional resources were all designed to contribute to the goal of introducing and encouraging transformational Bible reading at Horizon. All of these parts were intended to integrate sound theological truth, ancient methods of Bible reading and prayer, modern technology, and modern relevant language to facilitate positive

¹³ The text used in the *lectio divina* instructions and reading is similar to that used by multiple sources. It follows closely that used by Luke Dysinger, “Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina,” <http://www.saintandrewsabbey.com/SearchResults.asp?Cat=35> (accessed December 6, 2012).

¹⁴ See Appendix C for a display of the bookmark and the 5 Day Challenge card.

¹⁵ See Appendix D for the text of the *lectio divina* recording.

reception by the Horizon congregation. In addition to preparing the study itself, creating a plan for evaluation was a necessary component of the project.

Evaluation Plans

Evaluation of the success of the project primarily examined the participants' initial receptivity to the study and in particular their reaction to the practice of *lectio divina* as a method of transformational Bible reading. The evaluation mechanism included both formal and informal methods. The formal method used was through an evaluation survey obtained from the small-group leaders. After the completion of the study, the leaders were asked to respond to a set of questions and a request for comments.¹⁶

In addition to the formal questionnaire shown, I also informally obtained feedback from the group leaders and also from group participants. This was done at every opportunity available during the period of the study and also in the weeks following its conclusion. While the primary issue for the purposes of this project is how the study impacted the participants use of transformational Bible reading, the evaluation will also consider an appraisal of the content and format of the study as presented in the following chapter and in the appendices.

¹⁶ See Appendix E for the questionnaire.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION AND FUTURE PLANNING

The eight-week study which introduced transformational Bible reading was introduced to Horizon as church-wide small-group emphasis in conjunction with a Sunday sermon series. This chapter will primarily explore the evaluation of that experience and the options available for future use and development. The display of the full content, format and design of the study itself is too voluminous to include here. However, the majority of the content is included in the appendices. Portions of actual materials used will be displayed in order to demonstrate format and design of the study. In order to accomplish that purpose, Appendix A contains the complete leaders guide for the first lesson in its full design. The leaders guide is used for the example because it shows the full content of the student guide and also the leader notes while displaying the format and design of the booklet which was used. Appendix B includes the full student text of lessons two through eight with a minor exception. The “Coming Up” section as seen in the full booklet shown in Appendix A was excluded since the material it contained was redundant for the purposes of this paper. The bookmark reminder of the *lectio divina* methodology and “Five Day Challenge” card given as resources to the

students are shown in Appendix C. The complete text of the *lectio divina* recording, with an exception for the repetition of the Scripture reading, is shown in Appendix D.

While founded on experience and study, the presentation and completion of the church-wide study at Horizon had not been done before in that setting. Therefore, evaluation and review is an initial step leading to future plans for the encouragement and teaching of transformational Bible reading. The lessons learned during the evaluation of the project process will be used to assist in the development of future plans. The ultimate goal within Horizon is spiritual transformation which is consistent with the vision as stated in Chapter 1 which is to help people “discover the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, and become his devoted followers.” The purpose of teaching people to read the Bible transformationally, as is the manner recommended in this project, is not an end in itself but is a means to that goal. The evaluation process will assist in determining the effectiveness of the study used for this project and provide input for suggestions as to what modifications or improvement could be made that would contribute to the end purpose. In addition, the potential for further plans beyond the use of a small group study will be discussed.

Evaluation

The first consideration in the evaluation of the project was to assess the success of the initial presentation of the practice of transformational Bible reading to the church as a whole. The reaction of the students to the introduction of the method of *lectio divina* was at the heart of this part of the evaluation. The second consideration was to assess how any particular issues with the content, format, and design of the study could affect plans for

future development. Although the overall reaction to the major thrust of the project received the primary consideration, there were valuable lessons gained from the secondary issues which can be carried over into the planning and design of other church-wide studies.

Group Leader Responses

The first step in the evaluation process was to review the group leaders' responses to the evaluation questionnaire concerning the small-group study. Their responses to the survey were essentially positive in regard to the content of the study. They also generally gave an affirmative evaluation when they reflected upon the value of the study. The majority of the negative comments which they made in their appraisal had to do with the design of the study itself rather than its content or the students' reception of what was taught. In order to arrive at an overall assessment of the study, the group leaders' responses to each of the particular questions was assessed.

The first question generally asked if they felt that the material was or would be helpful for the individuals in their group as they grow as Christians. With the exception of one group leader, the response was universally positive. Most leaders were emphatically positive. One leader responded, "Absolutely! The series gave us some great tools to work with as we grow in our faith." Another thought it was helpful to be made "aware of the Bible as formational [and that] the section on prayer (RAP) was especially beneficial." In one group, the leader felt that much of the value was because the study caused the group to reflect more deeply on what influenced them in their growth and also on how their values conformed to those of Christ. In addition, it provided a "spiritually

relevant roadmap to the resources to change/transform toward the image of Christ.”

Another leader, who was not quite as effusively positive, thought that it served as a good study for new Christians. This comment was interesting and seemed in opposition to the nature of the complaint by a leader who expressed some reservations about the value of the study. He thought that there were some in the group who “might not have been able (or willing) to grasp the whole concept of the study.” He did temper his comment somewhat as he said that he was not sure that this was due completely to the complexity of the material, but rather that the difficulty may have been, at least in part, due to the sporadic attendance by some of the group members.

The next question asked what the leaders liked best or found most helpful about the lessons. The leaders did not provide a consistent response to this question. Several leaders responded that they liked the coordination between the sermon on Sunday and the study in the week following. The Sunday sermon provided a positive introduction to the material which was covered in the study lesson. One leader indicated that the study would have been difficult for the leader to teach if it had not been preceded by the sermon. A number of the leaders indicated that the closing questions were helpful in opening up group discussion because they caused the group to do more than just listen to the lesson. Multiple leaders repeated positive comments about the presentation on both the use of the Lord’s Prayer and the Read and Pray exercises which accompanied the lesson.

The question about what the leaders liked best was followed by the corollary question which asked what they liked least about the lessons. These answers were less instructive than those concerning what they liked most. None of the leaders responded

with any specific issues in regard to the content of the study. One leader had a problem with the open ended nature of the closing questions. She said that she felt the group had some difficulty adapting to that approach since they were accustomed to study questions that had specific answers which could be found in the study text or in specific Scripture verses. Once again, it is interesting that this comment is in direct opposition to the assessment of another leader. The other most common answers were that it was too intellectual, too academic or had too much material in each lesson. Some leaders complained that the lessons had not been well proof read and contained too many typographical errors and in some cases grammatical errors. They felt that this was a distraction at times.

In regard to the format of the study guide, most of the leaders responded that that it worked well for them. A few leaders had difficulty at first as they attempted to cover all the material in the leader's guide with the whole group. Several commented that once they grasped the concept that the leader's material was intended to give them advice in guiding the discussion and to give them additional foundational material, the format then worked well for them. One leader said he did not use the leader's guide as he wanted to give his own thoughts and ideas. The format of opening questions, the study, closing questions, followed by an application and prayer time did not elicit any explicit comments. My assumption is that the lack of comments was because the format and order of the parts of the study was similar to published studies which they had used in the past; and therefore very familiar to them.

The next two questions concerned the amount of material covered, the language, and the content of the lessons. All but a few leaders felt that the amount of material

covered in each lessons was the right amount for the normal small group time. Those who did not agree that the amount of material was appropriate felt that some of the lessons were too long. None of them indicated that any of the lessons contained too little material. A few of the leaders indicated that the content was at times “too deep” or that the language made too much use of “big words.” They also indicated that there would occasionally be a question, or a particular point, which they had trouble understanding. One leader saw the difficulty level as a positive aspect in commenting that “I don’t think you dumbed it down ... and people need to stretch a little.” Most leaders checked that the language and content was just right, but did not elaborate to explain why they felt that way.

The last item on the questionnaire was a catch-all request for any other suggestions or comments that they thought would be helpful. Since congregant’s are sometimes reticent to criticize the work of one of their pastors, especially in feedback that is not anonymous, the instructions emphasized the need for honest comments and not just those that were positive. Nevertheless, as has been the case thus far, the comments were mostly positive. In general, they indicated that the study was well received and that attendance was been consistent throughout the eight weeks. One leader remarked, “I did not want to do this study ... but it has been thoroughly appropriate for our group.” A second leader simply said, “We loved it.” Another leader commented, “We’ve learned about [the] essential accomplishments of Christ’s teachings ... the fact that we should, and can, change.”

The comments that were negative or gave suggestions for improvement indicated that it took the first few lessons to understand the format and to get into the content. They

felt that additional or more complete training of the leaders prior to the study would have been helpful. Another group leader communicated on behalf of her group that they specifically would like to have seen the inclusion a Scripture memory verse for each week, a one year Bible reading plan, a Bible version recommendation, and a self-assessment at the beginning and end of the study. These comments of the group leaders along with those made in response to the previous questions need to be appraised.

In reviewing the responses to the questionnaire, I tried to evaluate them in a measured way. As a pastor, I have experience with comments by congregants about various issues and therefore will temper those responses in light of that experience. For example, it is rare to have someone comment that a sermon or study was too simple or too easy. Therefore, while a consideration of the comments about the difficulty or language can be used for future studies or for revision of this study, it is also recognized that the intent in writing the material was to move the participants a degree beyond their usual comfort level in order to produce growth. The study was not designed to be easy and the minority of comments about the difficulty can in one sense be confirmation that it was appropriately difficult. It stretched some people enough to cause minor complaints, but it did not produce widespread complaints or elicit comments that people were completely lost. There should be consideration of use of language that may be unfamiliar to some and as a result either use an alternative term or define terminology appropriately. In the same vein, the comments about the amount of material in each lesson suggest that they be examined to determine whether or not the lesson could be divided in such a way as to allow enough time for thorough discussion within the session. In addition, the use of questions that were designed to be open-ended was intentional and it was expected that it

would cause some reaction from those who were accustomed to questions that simply call for regurgitation of the material. In fact, the instructors' notes specified that many of the questions were intended to be thought provoking or to elicit personal reflection.

There were some responses that were especially valuable for future reference in writing studies or in rewriting the study for this project. In week seven, the lesson about the Bible and the Church introduced two new terms that were intended to clarify the idea of the universal and local church. Unfortunately, the concepts did not translate well and caused some confusion. Fortunately, the leaders provided immediate feedback immediately after the lesson and clarification to the leaders for use in their groups. Most of these negative comments about typographical errors or grammar are items that can be easily corrected. Materials for use in the church do need to be prepared in time to provide for adequate proofreading and review in order to avoid needless distractions. Some of the responses also point out the need for leadership training. This is true in general but also is true in the case of church-wide studies or programs. Adequate training of small group leaders in advance will ensure that they understand concepts presented in the material and also give opportunity to rectify any problems that may exist either in the content or format.

The two areas that were the most important consideration of the evaluation were the overall value of the study and the reaction to the *lectio divina* (read and pray) exercises. The response in these areas was overwhelmingly positive. Every group leader reported that the material had either reinforced important concepts for some, or brought out new ideas for others. Even those who struggled with the open-ended questions felt that wrestling with the concepts in the material was beneficial. Since the introduction of

lectio divina was a central component of the project, the universally affirmative response to that part was a positive aspect of the evaluation.

Although specific questions about the *lectio divina* exercises and the use of the auditory recording were not included in the evaluation questionnaire, I still received feedback from the group leaders. Some of the comments were, “Two things we came away with were — the Holy Spirit breathed life into the Bible verses and the whole idea of *lectio divina* Loved the reading of the Bible passages on CD,” “The Read and Pray sessions were amazing. We will continue this in our group It changed the way everyone thought about Scripture,” and “The best part of the lessons was praying while reading.” Informal conversations with both leaders and non-leaders confirmed the comments on the questionnaires. Based on the experience of this project and also on other instances when I have introduced *lectio divina*, there seems to be a general first reaction that is reticent to reception due to a lack of understanding or because it sounds foreign. The initial first glance produces a questioning attitude that is unsure about the whole idea. Sometimes, group leaders have to be prodded to share the idea in a group. However, once they have gone through the process, the reaction turns to a positive one. This especially has been true when an audio recording is provided as guidance for the experience.

The final consideration in the evaluation process is an assessment of the evaluation strategy itself. It was the weakest portion of the overall project. Although, it can be argued that there is considerable value in informal feedback, it lacks the demonstrative strength of a more formal approach. A more extensive questionnaire for the leaders and the addition of a survey of the students would have been helpful. More

specific questions in regard to the *lectio divina* practice should have been included. A pre-study and post-study self-assessment as suggested by one of the study groups would also have been valuable. The post-study self-assessment could have been done immediately after the study to determine initial result or postponed until sometime later to determine more accurately the long-term results. It also would have been helpful to have provided specific learning goals to the leaders for each lesson. This would have allowed for a better assessment of the group participants success in achieving the goal.

Despite the limitations of the formal evaluation tool, the results of the leader questionnaire and informal feedback show that the initial study should be considered partially successful. The congregation was introduced to the essentials of spiritual transformation and to the concept and practice of *lectio divina* through the small group study which was reinforced by the senior pastor through correlating sermons. They have been exposed to idea of transformational Bible reading and responded positively to their first experience in its practice. Any issues specific to the study guide and process that have been raised in the evaluation process can be remedied.

Personal Observation and Reflection

Since some time has passed from the time when the church-wide study was implemented, I have been able to add some personal observations and reflection concerning the process. This includes reflection on the group leader feedback as well as observations beyond that information. These observations fall primarily into the area of leader training and the need to lead small groups in an interactive and experiential way. They will impact upon consideration for any future plans at Horizon.

The specific training given to the leaders was insufficient to provide for optimal presentation. Due to the informational background required to establish a foundational understanding for a transformational approach to Bible reading, the study contained a large amount of information to be disseminated. Partly due to training and partly due to my personality, I have become accustomed to conducting small groups in a highly interactive way. Therefore, I falsely made the assumption that the group leaders would have the same approach. Therefore, this issue was only minimally addressed in the pre-study training. It was addressed more in the leader guides, but even the format of the leader guides was new to most of the leaders, and could have used more thorough explanation. My intent was for the groups to operate in a very interactive manner, but I failed to provide the leaders with the proper training to facilitate that intent.

The group process could also have been strengthened by some revision to the study guides and lesson structure. In week five, the group was introduced to the process of *lectio divina* and participated in a group practice of the method. They were also given the “Five Day Challenge” card and asked to practice *lectio divina* (or “Read and Pray”) five times during the following week. In week six, there once again was a group *lectio divina* experience. In both weeks five and six, the leaders were instructed in the leaders guide to give opportunity for discussion. However, the study for week six did not provide any opportunity for the group to share the results of their “Five Day Challenge” experience. This was a clear oversight in planning. In addition, the practice would have been strengthened if further group *lectio divina* exercises had been included in weeks seven and eight. These exercises could have been related to the lesson of the week by using scripture passages corresponding to the week’s subject matter. This approach

would have provided four group opportunities for *lectio divina* in addition to the individual times, thereby, increasing the likelihood of establishing the ongoing practice.

The study introducing the concept and practice of transformational Bible reading was intended to model the practice. While this goal was partially achieved, the issues noted above contributed to more of an informational emphasis than was intended. The combination of improved leader training and a continuation of the group practice of *lectio divina* would have helped to increase the transformational emphasis. The ongoing question then is not so much simply how to correct these defects but rather how to continue to encourage, teach the practice, and work to change the culture of Horizon in such a way that makes it normative.

Post-Study Actions and Future Plans

One of the foundational truths delineated for spiritual transformation was that growth is normally a process that happens over time. It can easily be argued that the concepts of spiritual transformation applicable to an individual are equally applicable in the context of the local church as a community. If that is true, there is no quick fix to transform Church culture. Since it will take spiritual transformation in order to accomplish a change in the local church community, it is a process which equates to an individual conforming to the image of Christ. In addition, the truth that God is the one who ultimately accomplishes change for an individual is also true for the local church. However, as with the individual, we as a congregation at Horizon are called to do our part. Foster's approach is important enough to repeat here as he emphasizes that "the Spiritual Disciplines in and of themselves have no merit whatsoever. They possess no

righteousness, contain no rectitude. Their purpose — their only purpose — is to place us before God.”¹ Therefore, any future plans that we have at Horizon are not a magical tonic, but are our faithful attempt to place us in a position before God that gives him opportunity to act in accomplishing our spiritual transformation.

Interim Activity

Over three years has transpired since the project was implemented. Unfortunately, most of the future plans still remain in the future. Several factors have contributed to the slow implementation of the ideas expressed below. The first issue is my own personality and combination of strengths and weaknesses. My strengths lie in the theoretical and analytical realm. I am much stronger at the “thought” process than at practical implementation. The second issue is nature of Horizon. The church is very informal and not highly structured. This makes it difficult to implement structured continuing programs. Although I have great freedom to conduct personal activities, it is more difficult to implement a program which would affect the church as a whole.

The actions in the interim which have contributed to the continuing goal of this project have been mostly informal. On an individual basis, I have made the *lectio divina* bookmark available whenever someone has expressed interest, or when it seems appropriate to the situation. I have consistently introduced the practice in personal mentoring relationships. In a group setting, the primary introduction continues to come within “The Journey” program previously mentioned. The idea of transformational Bible reading is integral to the program, and the practice of *lectio divina* is repeated several

¹ Foster and Helmers, *Life with God*, 17.

times. The pre-recorded guided process is used as part of the closing retreat for the program. The process is implicitly included in the labyrinth experience made available each Easter. Additionally, the church has begun a quarterly “concert of prayer” in which I share the lead. While the experience of *lectio divina* is not explicitly practiced as part of that program, the concept of meditation and the integration of scripture and prayer is inherent within it. These interim activities are beneficial but implementation of future plans is still needed.

Leadership Training

The comments by several leaders expressing their difficulty at the beginning in using the design of the study are evidence of the need for training in the small-group leadership and in teaching. Some of the difficulty they experienced possibly could have been alleviated with more specific training for the leaders on the material. Therefore, as has been briefly explored previously, future plans will include expansion of leader training which emphasizes the teaching and use of transformational Bible reading in Horizon’s small groups and programs. The goal will be to see that an understanding of transformational Bible reading permeates the structure of Horizon. If the leaders of the groups and programs believe in the concept and understand its practice, it will spread to others. They will need to understand how small groups work and that their task is not just Bible knowledge. Bill Donahue addresses this as he advocates the need for people to “coach” small group leaders. He writes:

The vision for transformation transcends discussion of Bible content. Changed lives are at the heart of the vision. All other aspects of group life — including social interaction, compassion for one another, and Bible discussion — contribute to an atmosphere for transformation but are never sufficient in themselves.

Transformation takes place in the heart, resulting in attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors becoming like those of the Master, Jesus.²

In the past, small group leaders have been required to go through a specified training program. Unfortunately, this requirement was dropped several years ago. Although I cannot in my position unilaterally reinstate the requirement, I will be an advocate for that position.

Based on the pilot training, future plans include development of a more complete module-based course of training for teachers. Each module would stand on its own although they clearly would be interrelated. This module approach would allow for development of teachers who would aid in retention and propagation of the work begun in the initial sermon series and small group study. There are five suggested modules.

The first two modules provide a background of understanding the material to be presented and the audience. The first module is entitled “Introduction to Bible Study.” This module would include an introduction to the principles of interpretation and to the different types of Bible study resources available. Based on my class experience, I would begin with the principles of interpretation and introduce resources in response to the need presented as the students worked through the principles. I would use a sample text as a working case throughout the module. The second module is called “Knowing Your Students, Teaching for All Learning Styles.” This may be the most difficult module in which to solicit interest, but it is critical to learning to be an effective teacher. It was clear in the class that the time given to this topic was an eye opening experience for the

² Bill Donahue and Greg Bowman, *Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders: A Practical Guide for Those Who Lead and Shepherd Small Group Leaders*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 327-330.

students. Since the theory of learning cuts across boundaries of material, this is a specific area where resources from the secular world should be included in designing the module.

The last three modules deal with the practical application of the teaching process. The module is named “Teaching Methods” will focus on teaching using the inductive method, but will also give time to directed study. This would include one or more sessions dealing with the use of questions. This module would also include a section dealing with the small group process, specifically addressing the issue of giving a lecture versus leading an interactive group.³ The students would participate in preparation of a lesson plan for inductive study considering the dynamics of the small group process. The module designated “Creative Communication” Would present the basic principles of communication along with examples and hands-on experience with different creative techniques. The final module labeled “Teaching Practicum” would give the students an opportunity to put together what they learned up to that point. They would be required to teach an actual lesson themselves. The session would be videotaped, and then reviewed together with the entire class.

Integrating Transformational Bible Reading in Small Group Studies

Improvements will be made to the small-group introductory study based on the evaluation. The study is being rewritten and will have adequate proofreading to address issues raised in the questionnaire responses. The changes will also include additional *lectio divina* exercises and explicit instruction for group discussion of the experience.

³ Henry Cloud and John Townsend address this as “the difference between structured learning—like a geometry class lecture— and process and experience learning, in which we observe, experience, and come to realizations through the experience.” Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1963-1964.

Given that the overall response to the study was positive, it will be offered for use in future small groups and training situations. The concept of transformational Bible reading is such that its inclusion should be compatible with most small group studies regardless of the subject matter. Since I am most often the church staff member responsible for those studies, I will include the use of *lectio divina* exercise whenever possible. Even when externally purchased study materials are used, I will seek to supplement them with compatible *lectio divina* exercises. Whenever possible, a recording to guide the use of the *lectio divina* exercise will be made available for small group use and individual use as has already been done in combination with “The Journey” program materials furnished by VantagePoint3.⁴ The recording and the use of *lectio divina* as a supplement to their materials has been well-received. From a personal viewpoint, I will encourage the senior pastor and other pastors on staff to continue to use transformational Bible reading personally. I also will encourage them to promote the practice in areas where they have leadership and influence. The next portion of consideration for future plans is to attempt to look creatively beyond simply incorporating transformational Bible reading into existing adult programs.

Additional Exploration and Possibilities

Two other spheres warrant further consideration. One area which has not been previously addressed is that of youth and children. Further study could examine how the concept of transformational Bible reading might be introduced at a young age. It would consider the methodology for teaching it, and how the practice could be adapted for

⁴ [Randy Reese?], *The Emerging Journey*, (Sioux Falls, SD: VantagePoint3, 2009).

different age groups. The second area of consideration is to provide access to *lectio divina* recordings for personal use which could be used on an ongoing basis. Ideally, these would be available daily. When this project began the possibility of producing those at Horizon was the primary idea. The essence of the idea was that these could be furnished in a variety of formats, but most likely would be published online for use. They could follow an overall plan to cover the whole Bible or correspond to the Church year, or they could be developed upon request to fit with a specific church-wide or group study. Current technology gives us the potential for all these approaches. However, since this project began there has been an increase of sites on the internet which provide daily readings. A few examples are “Alive Now” and LectioDivina.ca.⁵ Although not strictly a *lectio divina* exercise, the DivineOffice.org offers the Liturgy of the Hours in an audio format and even provides applications for mobile devices.⁶ Although the proliferation of sites such as these provides a valuable resource, it does not completely rule out the potential for development specifically for Horizon. Local development would allow the recordings to be tailored to Horizon’s culture and could even be provided as an online tool to accompany a current church emphasis. The ultimate decision will involve weighing the value of Horizon specific recordings versus the considerable degree of effort involved in their production.

Regardless of any specifics, as with virtually every idea that is promoted within the church, plans to encourage transformational Bible reading at Horizon will not be static. They will need to change as culture changes and even perhaps as technology

⁵ Alive Now, “Audio Lectio,” <http://alivenow.upperroom.org/audio-lectio/> (accessed August 29, 2012); LectioDivina.ca, “Journey to Pentecost,” <http://lectiodivina.ca/> (accessed August 29, 2012).

⁶DivineOffice.org, “Prayers for August 29th,” <http://divineoffice.org/> (accessed August 29, 2012).

changes. In order for culture change to happen, there must be ongoing and in some ways continual promotion of the basic concept and practical training. Just as with spiritual transformation for an individual, we can expect spiritual transformation for Horizon to be an ongoing long term project in which we do our part, but God brings about the change.

CONCLUSION

The intent of this project was to introduce and encourage the practice of transformational Bible reading at Horizon. It appears that the initial thrust has been a success. That accomplishment is not sufficient. The challenge now is to sustain what has been accomplished and to continue what has been begun.

Much of the project presented here has been a culmination, at least to this point, of my personal journey in Christ. While I would still consider myself in the conservative wing of evangelicalism, I am not satisfied with simplistic solutions. I have found that many within the church who are looking for Bible study want pat answers handed to them. They are attracted to teachers who can tell them, "This is what the Bible means! It means what I teach." I am uncomfortable teaching that way. A friend of mine once told me that "we need to hold truth lightly." This was someone who believed in God and in the Bible fervently. What he understood was that God may be perfect but we are not. Truth does not depend on how ardently we defend it. Truth does not even depend upon whether or not we believe it. Ours must always be a position of humility even in the thing we believe most strongly. In that vein, I have moved from a position where I strived to completely analyze and understand every detail of the Bible to a place where I am more concerned about being obedient to the things I do understand. Beyond that, I must recognize that my submission to God and to his word can allow for Him to transform my life even beyond that which I can rationally understand. I am convinced that is an approach that will yield the best results in my life and that is the approach I desire to teach.

It is that wish that motivates this project. Over the past forty years, we have seen some dramatic changes in American culture and also within the evangelical church. Not long ago, on the occasion of an uncle's funeral, I had the opportunity to visit the small Southern Baptist church in Warrior, Alabama where I was first introduced to Christ. This small town, located about thirty miles north of Birmingham on Interstate 65, chose to resist growth as far back as the 1970s.¹ As a result, the view seen on the drive down the main street looked much like it did over forty years ago when I went there to live with relatives in the summer before entering college. Many of the storefronts had the same signs, only most of them were closed. The church itself seemed in some ways unchanged. The pastor was personable and energetic. The message given at the funeral service was clearly evangelistic. My uncle would have wanted it so. On the other hand, there was a drum set on the stage along with a keyboard. In the back of the church, there was a system set up for projection, and, although there were still hymnals in the pew, the words of the songs were displayed on a screen. There were a few African Americans in attendance, which would not have been the case in the summer of 1968. I share that experience to say that change is inevitable. Some of the changes may be mostly cosmetic, such as the projection system. Other changes may be more substantial as shown in the presence of African Americans at the service. A person cannot control whether or not we change. To cease to change is to die. What people can decide is what they want to be the source of that change. I have decided that I want God to be the source of that change and that the Bible is the way He has chosen to produce that change in me.

¹ This information is based on personal contact with relatives and others in the town during the times when much of the surrounding area was growing.

This thesis has examined the context of Horizon and the larger context of the evangelical church within which it exists. Both the local context and the larger context are ever changing. The change in the larger context since the 1960s has been significant and has largely been for the better. While we may see some decline in the position and influence of the Christian within American culture, many of the changes that have occurred have strengthened the Church. When I lived in the Bible Belt in Alabama and Kentucky, Christian Church attendance was the cultural norm. This made life as a Christian more comfortable and made it easy to come to church. It gave the illusion that the Church was healthy and powerful, but it was just an illusion. Historically, the best days of the Church have not been in times of cultural acceptance. Even though most would believe that the influence of the Church has declined in America, I am convinced that the Church still has a great role to play.

That role will depend a great deal upon the spiritual maturity of its constituents. This role largely will be determined by the degree of spiritual transformation. We in the Church universal and in the local church at Horizon need a transformation that is complete. We need a transformation that is continuing. We need a transformation that comes from the Spirit of God. One of the best ways I know to achieve that result is to practice and promote transformational Bible reading in company of the Holy Spirit, the Church and our own willingness to change.

I am thankful for my role as a pastor at Horizon which gives me opportunity to seek to bring about change. The senior pastor of the church grants me much freedom in developing and leading spiritual growth activities within the church. "The Journey" program will continue to be a significant part of that effort. It will remain the most

intensive program we have for discipleship development. However, the congregants who participate in that program tend to be those who are highly committed and yet spiritually hungry. The goal must be to reach beyond those with high motivation. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Horizon has a very warm, welcoming atmosphere that allows easy entry into the life of the church. This open atmosphere is a positive aspect, but it creates a tension between attracting new people and the desire to move those, who came due to the easy access, to a place of spiritual growth and increasing commitment. The church must consider how to effectuate change in those who are attracted by the easy access.

Reading the Bible for transformation is clearly part of the answer. The essence of this project goes back to the definition of spiritual transformation. It is to be “conformed to the image of Christ.” Legalism requires that we conform to an external set of rules. But as Foster tells us, “the aim is not external conformity ... but the real formation of the inner self — of the spiritual core, the place of thought and feeling, of will and care your It is the ‘inner person’ that is being renewed [*renovare*] day by day.”² Spiritual transformation changes a person internally in a way that goes beyond the requirements of following a set of rules. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” (Mt 5:17)

It is a paradox that something can be so simple and so complex at the same time. All the goals which are established within the local church can be achieved by spiritual transformation. If the individual members of the church are conformed to the image of Christ, everything else flows out of that. Pastors are often concerned about measurement, and there are things which can be learned from measurement. However, success in reaching

² Foster and Helmers, *Life with God*, 9.

the ultimate goal of spiritual transformation can only be partially evaluated by external appearances. Sometimes, attempts at external measurement can even be a hindrance as perfection cannot be attained in this lifetime. A former pastor of mine once told me that I needed to be more concerned about what direction I was facing than how far I had come. He was convinced that if followers of Christ kept our direction toward God, progress would be inevitable. That is the essence of promoting transformational Bible reading. Its practice will keep us facing the right direction. If the direction traveled is towards God, then by his grace , spiritual transformation will be inevitable.

However, the results of transformational Bible reading are not usually immediate. Michael Casey points out that it clearly should be evident that the benefits of transformational Bible reading are obtained over time. He writes: “It seems obvious that *lectio divina* is a sober, long term undertaking There is no guarantee of immediate gratification at the level of experience or of immediate improvement in the quality of life. *Lectio divina* is an element in a lifelong process of turning toward God: its effects are discernible only in the long term.”³ The goal and view of transformation must be one that is not looking for a quick fix but rather a life-time of change. Paul’s words in Romans 12:2 have served as a key verse in my life from the time I began my walk with Christ. That verse, along with Romans 8:28–29, forms the heart of this project. That is the purpose of promoting transformational Bible reading.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to *become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren....And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may

³ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 9.

prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom 8:28–29, 12:2).

APPENDIX A

FULL DISPLAY OF SMALL GROUP STUDY – WEEK 1

PASSPORT TO CHANGE



LEADER'S GUIDE

A SMALL GROUP STUDY
DESIGNED FOR
HORIZON COMMUNITY CHURCH

Leaders Notes

General Guidelines

1. The student handout is a tool primarily to be used to help the group take home what they learn. While you may choose to give out the study guide in advance of your meeting, it is not designed as a stand-alone document. It is meant to be used with a leader as a facilitator.
2. For some, the concepts presented in this study will challenge their established way of thinking. Your role is not to change them but is help them as they process through new ideas.
3. The study is designed to be used with the sermon series in the church service. The group study will follow the sermon presented on Sunday. Some of the material will duplicate what is in the sermon. This is intentional. Most of the group time should be given to discussing the questions and wrestling with the concepts.

Introduction

In his book, *Metamorphia*, Kyle Strobel uses the metaphor of a passport for Christian growth. He writes, "By itself, a passport is not likely to change the way you see the world, but if you're willing to invest some time and effort, it could enable you to take a journey to distant lands and experience things that have the potential to reshape your lens, your worldview. Conversion is the spiritual version of the passport. With it we are offered a portal to a new world, but it is only if we take advantage of this portal that we come to see the world in a new way. We have to commit to the journey."¹

This study is designed to help you to take advantage of the passport you were given when you made a commitment to follow Christ. The essential principles of the study are simple but for many of us they can reshape the way we approach our Christian journey.

1. The Christian life is one of a continuous process of being changed so that we become like Christ.
2. Everything about us needs to change.
3. Only God can change us but He chooses to make us partners in the process.
4. The primary tools God uses to change us are the Holy Spirit (God Himself), the Bible, and the Church.

The first three principles will be explored in lessons one through three of this study. In lessons four through seven we will look at how we can cooperate with God as he uses the tools of principle four to change us. A key element will be to evaluate how we approach the Bible. We need to read the Bible for formation (change) not information. Finally, we will consider how other spiritual practices work in the process.

Open your heart and minds to what God may have for you as we journey together. Get ready to have your passport stamped as you travel to other lands in our journey to become like Christ.

4. The leaders guide will contain some information for you as well as some suggestions. There will also be plenty of space where you can write your own notes.

Cal Thomas, a Christian syndicated columnist and social commentator, calls Christians to look at the quality of our discipleship instead of directing our indignation at the moral decay. He writes, "The problem in our culture... isn't the abortionist. It isn't the pornographers or drug dealers or criminals. It is the undisciplined, undisciplined, disobedient, and biblically ignorant Church of Jesus Christ."

(Quoted by Greg Ogden in *Transforming Discipleship*)

The reason Thomas' statement is true is that as Christians we have failed to change. The problem is that when we become a Christian, many of us change our schedules and activities but don't allow God to change who we are. The goal of this study is to change the way we look at the Christian life.

Talk about the concept of a passport. When you travel to other countries you learn from their culture. We want to travel to the countries of the Kingdom of God so that we learn the culture and worldview of God. A passport does not do us any good if we do not use it.

Leaders Notes

Open Up! 10-15 minutes (Note: the times given assume a 90 minute meeting and are suggested times. You may have to adjust the time if the length of your group session is different.)

Use the Open Up time to get the group thinking about change and about each person's attitude towards change. If you have a large group you may want to use only one of the questions.

Study 15-20 minutes

This study time is to reinforce and supplement the material presented in Sunday's sermon. (Some leaders may choose to integrate the Study and Questions section so as to ask the questions as each area is covered rather than completing the entire section before going to the questions.)

It is important to understand what is meant by change. Therefore, the definition is important to lay the groundwork for the rest of the lesson.

It's Always Time for Change

Open Up!

1. When it comes to change, (choose which phrase below best completes this sentence for you)
 - A. I am ready on a moments notice.
 - B. Give me a little while to think about it.
 - C. I'll get back to you in a few months.
 - D. You'll have to drag me kicking and screaming.
2. When was the last time you changed your mind about something? What caused you to change?

Study

We will look at three main truths about the Christian life and change.

1. Change is an essential part of the Christian life.
2. Change is a process over time.
3. We make a choice to embrace or reject change.

A Definition

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Leaders Notes

Sanctification is the theological term used for us being made holy or set apart. Each of the terms used helps to paint a picture of what the change is. The key points of the definitions given here are:

1. The goal or aim is to be conformed to the image of Christ.
Discuss what it means to be conformed to the image of Christ. What does it mean for us to be like Christ? Looks at the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22-23**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Spiritual formation is the currently popular term used to name the process of change and growth in Christ. Others use words like sanctification, transformation, conversion, or even discipleship. Regardless of the term used, it is a concept that is almost universally accepted in the Christian community *but not often embraced*.

Christian writers have defined spiritual formation in different ways, but the meaning is usually close to the same. Robert Mulholland defines it this way:

Christian spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.... Genuine spiritual formation, being conformed, is the great reversal of the negative spiritual formation of our culture. It reverses our role from being the subject who controls the objects of the world, to being the object of the loving purposes of God who seeks to "control" us for our perfect wholeness.²

Richard Peace defines it as:

The goal of transformation is to be conformed to the image of Christ.... The aim of transformation is to be so changed that who we are is conformed to who Christ is.... The aim of transformation is to become in reality what we already are in fact; bearers of the image of Christ.³

Change is an essential part of the Christian life.

Heaven is not the goal of the Christian life. The goal of the Christian life is to be conformed to Christ. You cannot follow Christ without accepting that goal.

Consider the statement also in
Philippians 2:5-8

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

2. We do not conform ourselves, we are conformed.

3. It is a process.

4. Mulholland — The purpose is to serve others.

5. Peace — The aim is that sanctification (who we really are) will match justification (who we are because of Christ's death).

If heaven is where we plan to end up, it makes sense to prepare ourselves to live there. Richard Foster in his book *Life with God* says "Heaven is most certainly an important part of this 'with God life.' This life is, after all, eternal. Hence, we want to become the kind of person inwardly so that when we do get to heaven we will want to stay there. Our feelings and passions and affections will have been so transformed that we will feel right at home in heaven."

Leaders Notes

Do we as Christians approach our Christian life as one of continuous change? Are we life-long learners as Christians?

If we believe that the Christian life is one of continuous change, how does that impact the way we live and the way we do church?

Romans 8:28-29 is clear. It is God's plan that we become like Christ.

See also 2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Lesson 1 — It Always Time for Change

Stephen Smith says,

To be a Christian means to be continually involved in the transformation process. We never get to quit changing. If we quit changing, we're spiritually dead.⁴

The Bible presents change as an expectation and even says it is preordained by God. Even the very beginning of our conversion is described in terms of change.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NIV)

²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Romans 8:28-29 (NIV)

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his **purpose**. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the likeness of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Change is a process over time

Ephesians 4:14-15 (NIV)

¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become

Leaders Notes

In his book *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation*, Mel Lawrenz makes this statement. “If you ask a wide variety of believers what was the most spiritually formative influence in their lives, what do you think they would say? Survey people and what you will find is that the most frequent answer is not ‘my mother,’ or ‘my home church,’ or ‘pastor so and so.’ The most repeated influence is ‘crisis.’”

When we think about growth in Christ and change, crisis situations almost immediately come to mind. Most of feel like we grow most in Christ when we go through bad circumstances. While this has an element of truth, it is exaggerated because dramatic change that happens through crisis is very discernible. We can see it. It is much harder to see the slow growth that takes place over a long period during good times and bad. We often don’t notice it because you can’t see it happening. It is like going to a family re-

mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Dramatic change makes for a good story and dramatic change does happen. God uses crisis events to change us, but most of the time we grow slowly. God changes us over time. Mel Lawrenz talks about how Jesus frequently used agricultural metaphors for growth and change. He says,

These and other pictures of God as grower demonstrate that God’s way of doing things in this world is *process*. Miracles, as the extraordinary speeding up of process, show that God is powerful enough to do whatever he wants however he wants. Growth, as the ordinary way things happen in the world, shows the way God has typically chosen to work in the world. If we insist that spiritual development occurs only in crisis events, we limit God and disregard his sovereign choice.⁵

We prefer things to be fast but God’s normal way is slow. We need to “wait” upon the Lord.

Isaiah 40:31 (NASB)

³¹ Yet those who wait for the LORD
Will gain new strength;
They will mount up *with* wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary.

union with your children and those who haven’t seen them in a while remark about how much they have grown. While you know they have grown because you can measure it, you don’t see it as a parent since you see them everyday and the growth is gradual. For Christian growth there is not such an obvious measuring stick so it is harder to recognize slow growth.

Discuss with the group how we can tell if someone has grown? What are our measuring sticks?

Leaders Notes

We will explore our part in the process of change in the third session. For this lesson, it is enough to just emphasize that we do play a part. God does not force change upon us.

Questions 25-35 minutes

Evaluate your group as you decide how to use these questions. Not each question will have equal value for your group.

1. You may have already covered this as part of the study.

2. See the Leaders Notes on page 6.

We make a choice to embrace or reject change.

The Bible tells us that we need to desire to grow. The primary imagery used is that of hunger.

1 Peter 2:2 (NIV)

² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

Matthew 5:6 (NIV)

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Although God is the one who changes us, He has chosen to work in partnership with us to accomplish that change. God gives us the freedom to choose to reject or resist change

Questions

1. Consider the metaphor of a passport. What are some ways that it explains a life of change in Christ?

2. Examine the definitions of spiritual formation by Mulholland and Peace. What are the key elements?

Leaders Notes

3. Discuss this issue in light of truly following Christ as opposed to a theological question of whether someone can be saved without living a life of change.

3. Consider the statement, "You cannot be a follower of Christ without living a life of change." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

4. Does it make a difference if we see "heaven" as our goal or "change to be like Christ" as our goal? Why or why not?

5. What are some images the Bible uses for change? With which one do you most identify? Why?

6. Describe your experience of coming to faith in Christ. Was it a dramatic sudden event or a process over time?

7. Describe some ways you have changed as a follower of Christ? Did these changes happen suddenly or gradually?

4. This relates to the question above. If our only goal is to get to heaven, it doesn't impact as much what we do afterwards.

5. Consider

A journey Psalm 84:5, Hebrews 11:8-10

A race 1 Corinthians 9:24, Acts 20:24, Galatians 2:2, Galatians 5:7, Philipians 2:16, Philipians 3:14, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 12:1

Growth 1 Peter 2:2, Mark 4:26-29

6. and 7. Use these questions to allow the group to explore how they have approached the Christian life as a life of change. These are intended to be open-ended and provoke discussion.

Leaders Notes

8. This question leads into the time of prayer.

Prayer/Application 15-20 minutes

You can model an attitude of openness and desire for your group. Your sincere desire will set the tone for the group.

8. What are some areas in your life where you would like to become more like Christ? If there was one thing in your life you could ask God to change instantly, what would it be? Why?

Prayer/Application

Pray together as a group as you end this session. Focus on asking God for:

- Openness to change
- Hunger for growth that is seen in I Peter 2:2 and Matthew 5:6
- An acceptance of change as a critical part of your life with Christ
- Faith that God will change you to be like Christ

Coming Up

In the next 7 sessions, we will discuss

- ⇒ What needs to change
- ⇒ How does change happen
- ⇒ Reading the Bible for the purpose of change
- ⇒ Reading and prayer — How to talk to God with your mouth full
- ⇒ How the Holy Spirit uses the Bible
- ⇒ How the Church and the Bible work together
- ⇒ How the Bible works with other spiritual practices

References

1. Kyle Strober, *Metamorphia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007) p. 34
2. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 2000), pp. 25-27
3. Richard Peace, *Spiritual Transformation, Taking on the Character of Christ* (An unpublished study guide), p. 18
4. Stephen Smith, *The Lazarus Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008) p. 103
5. Mel Lawrenz, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000) p. 31

Recommended Reading

- *Metamorphia: Jesus as a way of life* by Kyle Strobel
- *The Lazarus Life: spiritual transformation for ordinary people* by Stephen W. Smith
- *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation* by Mel Lawrenz

The first two books are aimed at general audiences and I recommend them for everyone. The last book is a little more technical and is aimed at pastors and group leaders.

APPENDIX B

THE SMALL GROUP STUDY STUDENT GUIDE WEEKS 2–8

Week 2: Everything Needs to Change

Open Up!

1. It is easiest for me to change my
 - A. Thinking
 - B. Feelings
 - C. Behavior
 - D. Physical Health and well-being.
2. It is easiest for me to help another person change their
 - A. Thinking
 - B. Feelings
 - C. Behavior
 - D. Physical Health and well-being.

Study

Mark 12:28–30 (NIV) ²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” ²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’”

Everything Needs to Change

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, he replied that it was to love God with every part of our being. It follows then, that in order to be conformed to the image of Christ, every part of our being needs to be changed.

What is everything?

It does not appear that Jesus’ intent was to delineate extremely specific areas of our being. He is saying that loving God involves every aspect of our lives.

However for purposes of understanding what needs to change in our lives, it can be helpful to look at the areas of our being. Different Christian writers have defined these areas in different ways. For this study I have chosen to define the areas as

- Our minds – How we think
- Our emotions and attitudes – How we feel
- Our behavior – How we act
- Our relationships – How we relate to others

Our Minds

Romans 12:1–2 (NIV) ¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Knowledge — Renewing of our minds must include correct information. We must not be conformed to the ignorance or misinformation of the world.

Titus 1:9 (NIV) ⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Romans 10:2–3 (NIV) ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Understanding — The acquisition of knowledge alone does not assure understanding. We need to know more than facts. We must know the story behind the facts. We must also be able to understand the meaning that those facts convey and how they relate to each other. The transformation of our minds should include wisdom.

Colossians 1:9 (NIV) ⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through *all spiritual wisdom and understanding*.

Convictions/Values/Beliefs — Knowledge and wisdom are important but they can become misguided if not anchored by biblical values. Our conscience is not a reliable moral compass, unless it is transformed by Scripture. Scripture can transform what we think is true (beliefs), what we think is right (convictions), and what we think is important (values).

Ephesians 5:15–17 (NIV) ¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Colossians 1:9 (NIV) ⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not

stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the *knowledge of his will* through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Worldview — All of the items shown above come together to form our paradigm. The way we see things is not the same as how the world sees things. Our filter or perspective is changed as our mind is transformed. Paul tells us that we see things differently than the world.

1 Corinthians 2:12–14 (NIV) ¹² We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. ¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Our Emotions/Attitudes

Transformation in Christ does not just mean transforming how we think. It must also transform how we feel. Those emotions and attitudes that are not the result of a logical process must also be changed. Much of our emotional health is tied to an accurate self-assessment.

Romans 12:3 (NIV) ³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Pride/Self-condemnation — Our incorrect self-assessment can go in two directions. We can either think more highly about ourselves than we should, or we can sink into the despair of self-condemnation. While one may be dominant in our thinking, most of us are able to move freely from one to another. The Bible has many warnings against pride.

Romans 12:16 (NIV) ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

James 4:6 (NIV) ⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Whereas, pride is an absence or incorrect knowledge of self, self-condemnation fails to recognize the true character of God. The incorrect assessment of self-condemnation is also addressed in Scripture.

Romans 8:1 (NIV) ¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Identity — Our identity is who we are due to our relationship to Christ.

John 1:12 (NIV) ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--

Romans 8:16 (NIV) ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Psalms 139:14 (NIV) ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Passions/Desires — Emotions and attitudes are not evil in themselves. They can be either positive or negative. Paul identifies this as a contrast between “flesh” and “Spirit” in Galatians 5.

Flesh — Transformation means that the ungodly passions and desires we have must be eradicated. Paul calls this “crucifying the flesh.” Many of the deeds of the flesh fall into the emotion/attitude category.

Galatians 5:19–21, 24 (NIV) ¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.... ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

The Spirit — The positive end of the process comes as a result of allowing the Spirit of God to transform us. Notice, once more, that the items identified as the fruit of the Spirit largely fall into the realm of our feelings and attitudes.

Galatians 5:22–23 (NIV) ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Emotional Healing — More and more, today's Church recognizes that all of us have experienced some kind of emotional wounding. Celebrate Recovery, a Christian 12 step program, calls these “hurts, habits and hang-ups”.³ Wholeness in Christ cannot be achieved without the healing of these wounds. Emotional scars may be self-inflicted or come from others. The Bible speaks to this healing.

Isaiah 61:1 (NIV) ¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

Our Behavior

Transformation is not just about how we think or feel. It must ultimately be expressed in what we do. In the previous areas, the emphasis was on the inner man. We stressed the importance of transformation of our attitudes and emotions.

Both Jesus and James say that the proof of internal change is in the external.

Matthew 7:16–20 (NIV) ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

James 2:17–18 (NIV) ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

Our Relationships

Relationships are not the most important thing of Christianity; they are ultimately the only thing. The final goal of the transformation process is the transformation of our relationships. Transforming our mind, feelings and actions are meaningless if it does not result in the transformation of our relationships. In fact, the entire point of transforming our thoughts, feeling and actions is to transform our relationships.

Love—The Great Commandment

We have already looked at Mark 12: 28–30. The next verse expands Jesus’ command. We also see that Paul confirms the priority.

Mark 12:31 (NIV) ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV) ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Our Relationship with God

The first commandment gives us the premier instruction for our relationship with God. We are to love God with our entire being. The command to love God is not in isolation. It must be understood in context of God’s love for us. God initiates and we respond.

John 3:16 (NIV) ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 5:8 (NIV) ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Our Relationship with Others

Our relationship with others may be initiated by either party. The dynamic is different in that we are not relating to a being that loves us perfectly as is the case with God. We are imperfect people relating to other imperfect people. While we must be responsible for our part, we cannot count on a loving response from others. Therefore Paul writes, *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men* (Rom 12:18).

Other Possible Areas of Our Being

You may see other areas or divisions of our being. Two that I see, but did not include, are our spirit and our body simply because it is so difficult to identify transformation in these areas — our spirit because it is beyond the realm our senses and our body because we are so subject to the effects of our sinful world. The fact that we will not address these areas in this study does not mean that they are not important.

Questions

1. Do you agree with the areas of our being that our suggested here? Why or why not? Are there any areas that you might suggest?
2. Which of the areas of the mind presented do you think is the most important? Why?
3. Which do you think is a bigger problem — pride or self-condemnation? Why?
4. Examine Galatians 5:19–24. Which of the items in the lists do you think are in the area of emotions and attitudes? Name some that are not listed?
5. Which do you think has to change first — our internal nature or our outward behavior? Why?
6. How does the principle of love apply to all our relationships? i.e. Does the principle look different in relationship with our family and our next-door neighbor?

Prayer/Application

Pray together as a group as you end this session. Focus on asking God for:

- Continued openness to change
- God's revelation for areas in your life where you need to change.
- Ask God how you can express the principle of love to others in your group.

Week 3: How Do We Change?

Open Up!

1. As a gardener, do you have
 - A. A green thumb
 - B. A yellow-green thumb
 - C. A black thumb of death
 - D. No thumbs at all
2. What does it take to make a plant grow?

Study

There are three ideas which are basic to understanding how change happens.

1. God is the source of our change
2. The Holy Spirit, the Bible and the Church are the main tools for change
3. God does not change us without our cooperation.

God is the source of our change

Hebrews 3:4 (NIV) ⁴For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.

The Beginning of Change — God is the source for change at the beginning of our journey, when we are newly born as Christians.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV) ⁸For it is **by grace you have been saved**, through faith--and **this not from yourselves**, it is the gift of God-- ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

Life of Change — The first thing we must understand about change or about our growth and progress as a Christian is that it is by grace. Just as our salvation does not begin by our own works, our life of being conformed to the image of Christ is also not by our own works.

Galatians 3:2–3 (NIV) ²I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

The tools of change

Kyle Strobel sees these tools of change as the “informers” of our worldview. “This is the equipment you will need for the *metamorpha* journey: the Bible, the Spirit, and a community of believers to travel with. I like to call these the ‘informers’ because

they are the tools Jesus uses to alter, or inform, our vision. Our vision is rarely radically changed all at once; is usually altered and informed over time by these tools.”¹

We travel with the Bible

Our heritage is one that emphasizes the Bible. We see Bible study and reading as critical to the Christian life.

2 Timothy 3:15–17 (NIV) ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Mark 12:24 (NIV) ²⁴ Jesus replied, Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?

God’s purpose in providing the Bible is to transform us. In the coming lessons, we will talk more about how we approach the Bible in order to allow it to change us. “To take biblical text as Scripture has to do with the aim of Scripture, which he insists is to ‘shape persons’ identities so decisively as to transform them.”² Joel Green

We travel with the Holy Spirit

The Bible does not work alone. Ephesians 6:17 says that the Bible is the sword of the Spirit. Our journey will go astray if we travel without the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13–15 (NIV) ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

Romans 8:9,14 (NIV) ⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ....¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

We travel with the Church

While most Christians believe in the need to be part of “church”, we don’t always see that it is an important part of God’s work in changing us. The Bible however, is clear that “church” is not an optional part of belonging to Christ. If you are going to travel with Him, you are going to travel with the Church. God uses us to change one another.

Hebrews 10:24–25 (NIV) ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) ¹⁷ As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

We are partners with God

Although we have established that God is the source of our change, the amazing thing is that God has chosen to include us as partners in the process. The paradox is that the God who is sovereign has chosen to give us free-will. God, who needs no help, asks for our help. We cannot journey alone, but the journey does not happen unless we step forward. Our part includes

- *Hunger and Openness*
- *Repentance*
- *Faith/Faithfulness*

Our part is to receive what God has, but it is active reception and not just passive acceptance.

Hunger and Openness

“Spiritual formation is the great reversal; from acting to bring about the desired results in our lives to being acted upon by God and responding in ways that allow God to bring about God’s purposes.... It is a journey of learning to yield ourselves to God and discovering where God will take us.”³ Mulholland

Our part begins with recognition of our need. We must be hungry, thirsty and open to what God will do in our lives. We must recognize that we cannot do it on our own.

Matthew 5:6 (NIV) ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

1 Peter 2:2 (NIV) ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

Psalms 42:1–2 (NIV) ¹ As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

Isaiah 55:1 (NIV) ¹ Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Repentance

Repentance means to change directions, to say we are not in control, that we are yielding control to God. It is not about us changing ourselves, but rather about giving God permission to change us.

Romans 2:4 (NIV) ⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

Acts 3:19 (NIV) ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Faith/Faithfulness

Faith means to put our trust in God. It is not only the belief that He can change us but that He wants to and will change us.

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

“The secret of waiting is the faith that the seed has been planted, that something has begun. Active waiting means to be present fully to the moment, in the conviction that something is happening where you are and that you want to be present to it. A waiting person is someone who is present to the moment, who believes that this moment is the moment.”⁴

Henry Nouwen

Faithfulness is continuing in faith even when we do not see immediate results. It is perseverance.

Romans 8:25 (NASB95) ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Remember as we learned in our first lesson. Change is the process of a lifetime. Faithfulness is therefore a key ingredient in our journey of change. It is a marathon and not a sprint.

Questions

1. In what ways are we like the Galatians and rely on the “law” after we began in faith?
2. Which is more important, believing that the Bible is true or doing what it says to do?
3. If the Holy Spirit is in us when we become a Christian, what does it mean to take Him with us on our journey?

4. Is it possible to be a Christian and not be part of the Church? Give a biblical example to support your answer.
5. What is some evidence or indication that we are “hungry” for God?
6. Describe what you think repentance looks like.
7. Who is someone you know who has faith and is faithful? Explain why you think they have that characteristic.

Prayer/Application

Pray together as a group as you end this session.

- Ask God to help you recognize your inability to change by your own power.
- Ask for forgiveness where you have done this in the past.
- Ask for guidance in knowing how to take the tools of change (informers) with you on your journey.
- Ask for God’s grace to do your part in the process of change.

References

1. Kyle Strobel, *Metamorphosis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007) p. 39
2. Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth : Reading the Bible as Scripture*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007) p. 5
3. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993) p. 30,32
4. Henry Nouwen quoted by Stephen Smith, *The Lazarus Life: spiritual transformation for ordinary people* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008) p. 37

Week 4: The Bible: Food for the Journey

Open Up!

1. What’s your favorite food:
 - a. In general?
 - b. When you are sick?
 - c. When you celebrate?
 - d. When you want to eat right?
2. Do you eat for health or for pleasure? Explain.

Study

An assumption

For the purposes of this study, we will make the assumption that the Bible is reliable. It is truly God’s word to us, and as such it is authoritative for our lives. This study is aimed

primarily at Christians who have already accepted that premise.

Eat this book

Eugene Peterson, translator of *The Message* has entitled his book about the art of spiritual reading *Eat This Book*. This is consistent with God's command to Jeremiah, John and Ezekiel. The biblical imagery in these passages shows our interaction with Scripture as much more than mere reading. We are to eat the words of the Bible.

Jeremiah 15:16 (NIV) ¹⁶ When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.

Revelation 10:9–10 (NIV) ⁹ So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." ¹⁰ I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.

Ezekiel 2:8–3:2 (NIV) ⁸ "But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." ⁹ Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, ¹⁰ which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. ¹ And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." ² So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

From information to formation

(Note: This section will contain a number of references to Robert Mulholland's book *Shaped by the Word*. In my opinion this is the best resource available on the subject.)

If we are to truly "eat this book", we must change our traditional approach to Bible reading and Bible study. We have been trained by both our educational and our religious culture to read a certain way.

"You are the 'victim' of a lifelong, educationally enhanced learning mode that establishes you as the controlling power (reader) who seeks to master a body of information (text) that can be used by your (technique, method, model) to advance your own purposes (in this case, spiritual formation.)"¹ Mulholland

Francis of Assisi recognized the danger in this approach to Scripture,

"Those are killed by the letter who merely wish to know the words alone, so that they are esteemed as wiser than others.... In a similar way, those religious are killed by the letter who do not wish to follow the spirit of Sacred Scripture, but only wish to know [what] the words [are] and [how to] interpret them to others."²

The Bible itself tells us that spiritual truth cannot be understood with the mind alone. It is spiritually discerned and reading the Bible cannot be just an academic exercise.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV) ¹⁴The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

We don't just come to the Bible to learn about God. We want to approach the Scripture to be changed, not just to study theology.

We believe that the Bible is unique among all literature. It is the only book that we can read that also reads us.

Hebrews 4:12 (NIV) ¹²For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The marrow is at the very center of who we are and thus the Word of God is able to discern the very center of our being. Since the Bible reads us, we must approach it openly and recognize that the goal is for it to master us, not for us to master it.

Mulholland gives a comparison of informational versus formational reading that can be helpful as we seek to change our approach.³

Informational Reading	Formational Reading
Seeks to cover as much as possible as quickly as possible so as to quickly get the data needed to do what must be done.	Avoids quantifying the amount of reading.
<p>Is linear.</p> <p>Seeks to master the text. We bring it under our control.</p> <p>The text is an object “out there” for us to control and/or manipulate.</p> <p>Is analytical, critical, and judgmental.</p>	<p>Is in depth.</p> <p>Allows the text to master you.</p> <p>We are the object that is shaped by the text.</p> <p>Is humble, detached, receptive, and loving.</p>
Is characterized by a problem-solving mentality.	Is open to mystery.

The worldview lens: Which lens is which?

We come to our reading of the Bible with a dilemma. We have come to accept that our worldview needs to be one shaped by and consistent with Scripture. The Bible needs to be the lens through which we view the world. The problem we face is that we naturally view and interpret the Bible through our culturally shaped worldview. In other words, what we see as the biblical worldview is colored by our non-biblical worldview.

Whew! That sounds hopeless. Don't despair. This is much like Paul's dilemma about trying to do what's right.

Romans 7:24 (NIV) ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

As always, our hope is in God, not ourselves. But there are some principles that we can follow that will help.

Humility — We need a passport.

We begin by recognizing that we are fallible humans, not only in how we live, but how we think, how we interpret, and how we feel. We need to “hold truth lightly”. That means that we are committed to what we believe is true but recognize that it is not our belief that makes it true. Humility recognizes that our view of Scripture is colored by our culturally shaped worldview. We can be wrong.

Recognize our worldview — What worldview country issued our passport? What is our bias?

Our worldview is shaped by our culture (modern western American thought for most of us), our family, our church background, and our experiences. We need to be most alert to the possibility of error where we see the Bible agreeing with the worldview our culture has given. This doesn't automatically mean that our view is wrong, but we must remain open to the possibility. If you don't know your bias, ask someone who disagrees with you. They will be happy to you (at least as they see it.)

Consider the views of others outside our culture — We need to use our passport.

The purpose of the passport is to visit our countries. When we use our passport we need to listen, consider, and absorb the culture of the countries we visit. That means we must face the terrifying act of listening to and considering the idea and opinions of those outside our cultural worldview, whether it be our nation, ethnicity, local church, family, or theological viewpoint.

Consider all three tools for our journey, remembering that all three tools work together. We need to listen to the Holy Spirit and to the Church as we read the Bible.

2 Peter 1:20–21 (NASB95) ²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Putting it into practice

Jesus said that if we love Him we will do what He told us to do.

John 14:15 (NIV) ¹⁵ If you love me, you will obey what I command.

Therefore, since the Bible is the record of His commandments, we are to do what the Bible instructs us to do. The problem comes when we obey those instructions out of legalism rather than a changed heart.

From “Being” to “Doing”

In week two, we talked about the areas of our lives that needed to be changed. Much of the emphasis was on the inner man. We stressed the importance of transformation of how we think and feel.

Matthew 23:25–28 (NIV) ²⁵ Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. ²⁷ Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

The Pharisees had the “doing” part down. But that is not all that Jesus desires. Remember the goal is to be conformed to the image of Christ. That means the inner man has to change as well.

Mulholland writes, “The Pharisees not only emphasized ‘doing’ as the means of being in right relationship with God; they also emphasized ‘doing’ as the means of ‘being’ all God expected.”⁴

“*Our doing ultimately flows from our being.* This is why we have such difficulty in ‘doing the dos and don’ting the don’ts.’ Whenever our Christian ‘doing’ is a structure imposed from without, it will inevitably be thwarted by the dynamics of being that flow from within. The distorted word we are within will ‘shout down’ the external imposition of any other word we try to ‘do’.”⁵

James who emphasizes outward works more than any of author in the New Testament agrees that ‘doing’ comes out of ‘being’.

James 4:1–3 (NIV) ¹ What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

It would appear then, that once the way we think and feel has been transformed, our 'doing' will naturally flow from our 'being'. Experience has shown that it just doesn't always work that way. We must remember that the lines between these categories are not hard and fast. While there is a logical progression, transformation is not always linear and unvarying. Sometimes the external act precedes the internal transformation.

Mulholland again offers insight.

“We offer to God some specific act of obedience to God’s Word at a point in our life where what we are in our being is not in harmony with that act of obedience; at a point where our ‘doing’ does not flow from our ‘being.’ When we consistently offer ourselves to God in this act of obedience as a true spiritual discipline ..., then in God’s timing, we make a discovery.... God has worked in our being through the Holy Spirit to transform what we are....”⁶

Once again we seek to bring together the truth that only God can change us, but he has chosen to bring about that change with our cooperation. In the last lesson of this study we will talk about the “spiritual disciplines.” Legalism and true obedience can sometimes look the same from the outside, so we must always be on guard for our inner being.

Questions

1. Eugene Peterson says we should come to the Bible like a hungry dog chews on a bone. How does that compare to your approach to the Bible?
2. In your own words how would you describe the difference between “informational” and “formational” reading.
3. What does it mean when we say the Bible can read us?
4. What does it mean to allow the text to master you rather than you mastering the text?
5. The study gives three suggestions to help us overcome our worldview as we read the Bible? Can you think of other things that could be helpful?
6. What can we do to recognize and determine what is our biased worldview through which we view Scripture?
7. What is the difference between obedience as legalism and obedience as an act of faith when it doesn't match with how we feel inside?

Prayer/Application

Pray together as a group as you end this session.

- Ask God to help you identify your natural worldview.
- Ask for God to reveal where you allow your natural worldview to color your reading of the Bible.
- Read a passage of Scripture in the coming week with an eye towards an examination of how your worldview might affect your interpretation.

References

1. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 2000), p. 19
2. St. Francis of Assisi, *Francis and Clare, The Complete Works* (New York, NY, Paulist Press, 1982, Translation by Regis Armstrong and Ignatius Brady), p. 30
3. Mulholland, p. 49–60
4. Ibid, p. 98
5. Ibid, p. 102
6. Ibid, pp. 118–119

Recommended Reading

- *Shaped by the Word* by Robert Mulholland
- *Eat This Book : A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* by Eugene H. Peterson
- *Life With God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* by Richard Foster

Week 5: Read and Pray: Talking to God with Your Mouth Full

Open Up!

1. Describe your memories of family meal time growing up. Is this a positive or negative memory for you? Why?
2. What is your family meal tradition for your favorite holiday? Share any traditions, beyond just the food, that are part of the holiday meal time.

Study

We need to talk to God with our mouth full. While this statement goes against our cultural norm for good manners, it is intended to convey our need to combine the Bible and prayer. In the last lesson, we presented the theme of Eugene Peterson's book, *Eat this Book*. We will continue and expand that idea in this lesson.

Breaking bread together

The idea that eating a meal together is a social event which builds relationships is an accepted truth across many different cultures. We see ads on TV promoting the family meal together as an important way for parents and kids to communicate. In Acts, Luke presents it as an essential element of the first Christian community.

Acts 2:42 (NIV) ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the **breaking of bread** and to prayer.

Conversational eating

Conversation is an important part of a good meal. The last lesson indicated that the Bible is meant to be eaten. But it is not meant to be eaten in silence. We need to engage in conversation at our Bible table. We need to read *and* pray. We need to talk to God (pray) with our mouth full (read). Unfortunately, many Christians today see Bible reading or study and prayer as two completely separate activities.

The Scriptures, read and prayed, are our primary and normative means of access to God as He reveals himself to us. The Scriptures are our listening post for learning the language of the soul, the way God speaks to us; they also provide the vocabulary and grammar that are appropriate for us as we in our turn speak to God. **Prayer detached from Scripture, from listening to God, disconnected from God's words to us, short-circuits the relational language that is prayer.**¹

If we compartmentalize our Bible reading and prayer, we make our conversation with God like email. God sends us an email, and we send back a response or vice-versa. It's not that no communication happens, or that no relationship is built, but it is a poor substitute for sitting down and having a conversation at a meal together.

Talking to God with your mouth full

If we eat all the time without conversation, we will be socially deficient. At the same time if we converse all the time without eating, we will be malnourished.

When Americans are asked if they pray and believe in prayer, the substantial majority will answer yes. However, what many mean by prayer is asking God to do something. Our prayers tend to be, "God, please _____ (fill in the blank)." Certainly, prayers of petition or supplication are valid, but they are not the focal point. Prayer must first of all be about our relationship with God. If prayer is about our relationship to God, then our prayer time must be intertwined with His word. In other words, we must talk to God with our mouths full.

How to pray

There is no specific “right way” to pray in terms of the technique of prayer. The Bible talks of multiple times, postures, and ways in which we can pray. We will present two ideas that have been broadly used throughout the Church. They are helpful in that they incorporate the idea that prayer and Scripture go hand in hand.

The Lord’s Prayer (or The Model Prayer)

Although we traditionally know this as the Lord’s Prayer, it really is not so much His prayer as it is the model that He has given us. Here is a suggestion of how it can serve as a model.

Matthew 6:9–13 (NIV)

This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

Begin your prayer time by thanking God for being your Father. Praise Him and focus on His goodness, holiness and power. Prayer is first and foremost relational. The entire prayer is founded on our relationship to God as Father.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Pray for God’s will in

 Yourself - Your family - Your church -
 Your city, state, and nation

Give us today our daily bread.

Pray for specific needs in your life and the life of those around you.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Ask God’s forgiveness and decide to forgive others.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,

Put on the whole armor of God. Pray through Ephesians 6:10–17. Ask for help in areas of temptation.

For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

End your prayer time by reaffirming God’s goodness, holiness, and power. Begin and end in praise to Him.

Lectio Divina (Spiritual Reading)

There are different ways to read. It can depend upon what we are reading. We read a love letter or a letter from a best friend differently than we read textbooks, magazines, or newspapers. When reading Scripture, there is a way of reading that most closely resembles reading a very special letter. It is called in Latin “*Lectio Divina*”, which literally means “spiritual reading.” It is a four-fold method developed in the sixth century by Saint Benedict. Diverse parts of the Church community have found this way of reading and praying to be valuable.

The four parts of the ancient practice of spiritual reading are ***Read, Meditate, Pray, and Contemplate***. We will describe each part.

Read — This kind of reading is careful, reflective, and allows what is read to sink in. In reading the Scripture, read the passages as if for the first time and in a very personal way, believing that God speaks in the very reading of the word. Seek the words and phrases that may have particular meaning and significance to you right now.

Meditate — Meditation has to do with pondering what has been read for its deeper significance. Sit with the words and consider them. Allow the words to move from your mouth and your mind into your heart, where they can take on more profound meaning. In the early Church, meditation involved a practice of repeating the words until they were formed in the heart. You might want to repeat the words that seemed to have the most significance and move those words to a place of deeper awareness.

Pray — Now, you respond to the meditation. After the Scripture is formed in our heart in meditation, this is the verbal expression of prayer that flows from your heart. Perhaps some emotion has been touched: anger, pain, gratitude, or whatever. You speak it. Perhaps the scriptural meditation has led you to self-examination, or an awareness, or an understanding. In this part, you tell or write this to God.

Contemplate — Finally, you rest. “Contemplation” is that time of silence after speaking or writing. Here you wait, listen, and become receptive to whatever God may want to do with you. In contemplation, there is no agenda or expectation. This is a time to simply “be” with God.

Questions

1. Is your prayer time one-sided, or is it a conversation? Why?
2. Do you have conversation with God when you read the Bible? Why or why not?
3. What is your favorite part of the Lord’s Prayer? Why?
4. Which of the four parts of the practice of Spiritual Reading most appeals to you? Why?
5. Which part do you think will be hardest for you? Why?

Prayer/Application

Your group leader will lead you in an adaptation of the practice of “Spiritual Reading” as a group. You will use Romans 12:1–8 for this exercise.

Romans 12:1–8 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. ³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

You have also been given a personal guide to use for your own private practice. After your group exercise, ask God what commitment he would have you to make for the coming week. Make your commitment a prayer. You may find it helpful in keeping that commitment if you share it with your group. Be willing to stretch yourself but also don't be unrealistic. It's better to start small and succeed.

Dear God,

During the next week, I will have a time of “Spiritual Reading” at least:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> One time | <input type="checkbox"/> Five times |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two times | <input type="checkbox"/> Six times |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three times | <input type="checkbox"/> Once every day |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Four times | |

References

1. Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book : A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*, (ed. H. Peterson Eugene. Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2006) p. 104

Recommended Reading

- *Shaped by the Word* by Robert Mulholland
- *Eat This Book : A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* by Eugene H. Peterson
- *Life With God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* by Richard Foster
- *Savoring God's Word : Cultivating the Soul-Transforming Practice of Scripture Meditation.* By Jan Johnson

Week 6: The Bible and the Holy Spirit

Open Up!

1. Share a time when you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit.
2. Describe your “picture” or understanding of the Holy Spirit.

Study

The Bible is the word (and words) of the Holy Spirit

Previously, we named three tools or worldview “informers” to pack in our travel bags as we use our passport. They are the Bible, the Holy Spirit and the Church. Of these three, the Holy Spirit is the most important simply because the Holy Spirit is God Himself. Kyle Strobel puts it this way:

“It is important to note at this point that the Spirit, as God, is vastly more worthy and important than the other two worldview informers. This might come as a surprise in light of how central the Bible is to the Christian faith. The important distinction is one of kind, not one of clarity. The Spirit is a person of the everlasting God, who took part in creating the Bible and who works through it. The Spirit, due to who he is, automatically becomes the most central of the worldview informers.”¹

This assertion does not diminish the importance of Scripture at all, but rather asserts our recognition that it is **His** Scripture. He did not leave a letter to be read in His absence. He is present as we read.

The Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible

2 Timothy 3:16 (MSG) ¹⁶ Every part of Scripture is **God-breathed** and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way.

The word for *breathed* is the word for spirit. So it is God’s Spirit that creates Scripture. It could be said that just as man was only a body until God breathed life into him (**Genesis**

2:7), written or spoken words are merely words until God breathes life into them. Then they become Scripture.

See also **Matthew 22:31–32, Acts 1:16, 28:25, and 2 Peter 1:21**

The Holy Spirit is our guide in reading the Bible

1 Corinthians 2:10–16 (NIV) ¹⁰ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. ¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: ¹⁶ “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

John 16:13–15 (NIV) ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

The Holy Spirit is the driving force in the creation of the Bible and is also the driving force in the reading of the Bible. The Bible is Spirit-breathed and as such should be Spirit read.

The danger we face is in our subjective understanding of our interaction with the Spirit. Following the quote from Kyle Strobel above, he goes on to explain the difficulty that is involved.

“Yet, due to the nature of the Spirit, we have a much harder time sifting through our own misconceptions, feelings, and thoughts to hear from him. The biblical text becomes a filter for how the Spirit works so that we can hear and discern him. It is of immense importance, though, that we do not pit the Spirit in the Bible against each other, vying for authority. The Spirit took part in creating the Bible, so we must acknowledge the Bible's authority, and the Spirit works within the boundaries described in the Bible (his character, disposition, etc.), even though those boundaries are often vague and without much explanation.”²

The bottom line is that the Holy Spirit who is God will not contradict His word, but He will explain His word and enable us to comprehend it. On the other hand, the Bible

without the Holy Spirit is not understandable.

The Holy Spirit is the power of change in reading the Bible

Hebrews 4:12 (NIV) ¹² For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Romans 8:26–27 (NIV) ²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. We have previously stated that the Bible is the only book that reads us as we read it. The words of the Bible without the Spirit are powerless to change. They are not magic words that we use to manipulate the unseen forces. Their power is in the Spirit that created them. Richard Foster explains this further:

It is a short jump from bibliolatry to magic — the attempt to manipulate the supernatural for personal benefit. A magical approach to the Bible bypasses the living God by treating Scripture as a sort of Ouija board, collapsing any possibility for true relationship. Instead, the Bible becomes an oracle, overriding human choice and responsibility -- for example, when we open it randomly and with closed eyes point a finger to wherever it lands on the page, passively accepting the “chosen” verse as the guide to our next decision. . . . The “pull” of the Scriptures upon our lives is rooted not in magic power, but in the reality of the One who speaks to us through them.³

Opening ourselves to the Spirit in Bible reading

If the Spirit is essential in reading the Bible, then the questions become once more, what part do we play in the process.

Be filled with the Spirit

A full explanation of this point would require a separate study, so I will only make the point here that if the Bible is spiritually understood, then it follows we must be Spirit-filled and led in order to gain understanding. The Bible tells us that simply “having the Spirit” as born-again believers is not enough. See I Corinthians 2:10–16.

Ephesians 5:18 (NIV) ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Participate by openly receiving the words and actions of the Spirit

Foster highlights our participation as surrender.

“The Bible is not a tool for sharpening our religious competence, but a living and acting sword for cleaving our double-minded thoughts and motives, exposing and transforming the contents of our heart (see Heb 4:12). The best guard against any handling of the Scripture that leaves our souls untouched -- and ourselves unchanged -- is surrender to the cleansing, forming flow of the Holy Spirit. Simply, this means opening our whole selves -- mind, body, spirit; thoughts, behavior, will -- to the open page before us. We seek far more than familiarity with the text alone; instead we are focusing our attention through and beyond the text to the God whose reality fills its depths.”⁴

Jan Johnson gives a very specific approach as we begin to read our Bibles.

“For years I’ve been practicing and teaching the familiar styles of Scripture meditation, but it seems that only recently I’ve begun to grasp this basic point: each time I approach the Scripture, I need to deliberately and submissively give God permission to speak to me through those Holy-Spirit-breathed words. It’s actually a prayer of request: Veni, Spiritus Sancte (Come, Holy Spirit). Maybe because I’ve let my mind wander so often, I now understand I need to preface any meditative interaction with Scripture by asking with a sincere, searching heart for the Holy Spirit to speak to me today.”⁵

Our part is to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures. We are open to receive His words showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, (and) training us to live God’s way. We are open to receive the Spirit’s guidance as we read when it comforts us, and when it confirms what we thought, but also when it corrects our wrong worldview, when it challenges us to make changes and to do things we did not think we could do. We are open to the Spirit changing who we are inside, not just changing what we do.

Questions

1. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is the most important of the “informers”?
2. Does it make a difference the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture?
3. How can we misuse the Holy Spirit in reading Scripture?
4. What do you think Foster means by, “The ‘pull’ of the Scriptures upon our lives is rooted not in magic power, but in the reality of the One who speaks to us through them.”
5. Eugene Peterson says, “If we reduce the Bible to a tool to be used, the tool builds calluses on our hearts.”⁶ How is that true?
6. How do we make ourselves open to the Holy Spirit?

Prayer/Application

This lesson will conclude with an exercise in Read and Pray. Your leader will play a CD that will guide you through the process we learned in the last lesson.

References

1. Kyle Strober, *Metamorpha* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007) p. 103
2. Ibid, p. 104
3. Richard Foster with Kathryn A. Helmers. *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008) pp. 25–26
4. Ibid, p. 62
5. Jan Johnson, *Spiritual Meditation* (An article appearing at www.metamorpha.com)
6. Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book : A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*, (ed. H. Peterson Eugene. Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2006) p. 92

Week 7: The Bible and The Church

Open Up!

1. Describe your view of church as a child?
2. How is this different from your view of church now?

Study

What is the Church?

Since the term, the Church, can mean different things to different people, we will define the Church in order to provide clarity for this study.

The foundational Church

The Church is first of all the inclusive body of all people of all time who have become joined to Christ. This concept is foundational to our understanding of the Church. The Church “universal” is the Church that is the “bride of Christ” and is the Church that will be with Him at the end of time.

Ephesians 5:23–30 (NIV) ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of **the church, his body**, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as **the church submits to Christ**, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as **a radiant church**, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as **Christ does the church--** ³⁰ for we are **members of his body**.

(See also Matthew 16:18, 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; and Colossians 1:18,24)

The functional Church

While the concept of the foundational Church is important, it is not the Church where we live day to day. We want to look at the functional Church. That is the Church that functions practically in our lives. There are several ways of looking at the Church in world today.

The Local Church

In a city — Acts 8:1, 13:1, 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1

In a house or smaller group— Romans 16:5, Colossians 4:15, and Galatians 1:2, 22

Terms or metaphors used for the Church

1 Peter 2:3–10 — **a house, a priesthood, a nation, a people**

1 Corinthians 12:27 — **the body of Christ**

Galatians 6:10, 1 Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter 4:17 — **household (family)**

In all the terms and metaphors used to describe the Church we see that the word can be used to mean any group of Christians who relate together, from the smallest group to the universal Church. It appears that the use of the term for a local functioning group would include the need for regular gathering together for worship, some leadership structure and accountability, and a presumption of relationship to Christ and orthodox doctrine. This is a much broader idea than our general concept of a church with a building and formal structure but is not so loose as to just mean any Christians who happen to get together sometime.

For the practical purposes of this lesson, we can see the Church in terms of an expanding circle of influence. These are not absolute categories or theological designations. They are simply intended to help us recognize the value of the Church from the circle where the relationship is most intimate and immediate all the way to the relationship with the broad spectrum of the Church as a whole.

Family — These are those Christians who are very close to us and live with us day to day. This could be our small group.

Community — This is the group of Christians where we may not have the kind of intimacy that we have with family, but they form the social network and leadership structure in which we live as Christians. The organized local church would fill this function for most Christians.



Nation — This is the broader group that doesn't impact us so much in our daily lives as it does in providing some guidelines, support, and restraint to our local church group or

structure. This could be a denomination or a less formal relationship of association or tradition.

World — This is closest to Church universal and considers the influence of all Christians in the world today as well as the legacy of tradition left behind by those individual Christians and groups of Christians who have gone before us.

Each of these circles has a part to play in the Church as “informer”.

The dysfunctional Church

When we look at the two previous “informers” we recognized their perfection. The Bible as authored by the Holy Spirit is without error. The Holy Spirit is God and by definition is perfect. With those two tools of change, any problem has to do with our perception, faulty lens (worldview), or own issues in general.

The Church as “informer” is different. On the negative side, it is not perfect and not infallible. It can be dysfunctional. This difference makes it inherently the weakest of the informers in terms of its trustworthiness. We may even be amazed that God has chosen to use it or may even question whether it is appropriate as one of our “informers.” On the positive side, it is the “informer” that has the most direct contact with us. It is where we live. We will look at how God has chosen the Church to work with the Bible to bring about change in our lives. We will remember the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,

“Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.”¹

The Church and the Canon

The term *canon*, from the Greek word for “reed” or “measuring rod,” refers to the list of books accepted as God’s word and, therefore, as comprising the Bible.

The Holy Spirit is the author of the canon

We established in the previous lesson that the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture. In the same way we must affirm that the Holy Spirit is the author of the canon. It is the Holy Spirit that is the ultimate decision maker as to what belongs in the Bible and what does not.

The Church as community recognizes the canon

We do not have a tablet of stone or a list showing the books of the Bible with the Holy Spirit’s signature attached. So how do we know what should be in the Bible? There have been a number of criteria proposed and used over the years such as:

1. Apostolic origin — written by an apostle or someone close to them
2. Church use — read publicly by the early Christian community
3. Consistent message — the theology and doctrine is consistent with other accepted writing

Few, if any of us, have actually gone through the individual books of the Bible and evaluated them to see if we believe they should be in the Bible. Instead, we have accepted Church tradition to determine what we accept as Scripture. As Protestants, we accept the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments that were affirmed by several Church councils in the 4th century, culminating with the Council of Hippo in 390.

The Church does not decide what Scripture is, but the Church is the practical tool for the recognition of what the Holy Spirit has determined is Scripture.

Reading the Bible with the Church

The Church acts with us as individual believers when we read the Bible for information (interpretation and correct doctrine), and also when we read it for formation (application, both tangible and intangible).

The Church and information (interpretation)

The Church is the interpreting community of the Bible. In the same way as it recognizes the canon, the Church recognizes the correct interpretation of the Bible. In spite of its fallibility, the Church is the interpreter and the conveyer of the Bible. We see the first instance of this in Acts 15 at the council of Jerusalem. The issue is unimportant for our discussion, but the expression of the decision made captures the essence of the role of the Church.

Acts 15:28 (NIV) ²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements....

The role of the Church is to recognize and agree with the Holy Spirit. There are strengths of each circle from the inner circle of *family* to outer circle of *world*. The innermost circle is most able to help us interpret personally and can give us immediate feedback. However, the innermost circle is also most likely to have the same natural worldview and blind spots as we have. As we include the outer circles of the Church in helping us read the Bible, we are more likely to find a higher level of expertise and also a wide range of worldviews which can help us to evaluate possible error in our in worldview. It is precisely in the role of interpretation that we are most comfortable in choosing to listen to those closest to our inner circle and those who are most like us. We often do not seek to hear any interpretation that does not fall within our understanding of orthodoxy. We tend to think that listening to a variety of voices could cause us to go astray. Richard Foster asserts the opposite,

“Reading the Bible with one another in the Spirit of Christ is what protects us from being ‘tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming’ (Ephesians 4:14).”²

The Church and formation

The Church not only is the community that helps us interpret the Bible and learn correct information, it is also the laboratory where the Bible works in us to conform us to the image of Christ. Sometimes our emphasis on information has lessened this role of the Church. Kyle Strobel outlines this danger,

“Because information has been the sacred cow of the Protestant tradition, we have minimized the importance of community growth out of fear that the information will be compromised. Sadly, in doing so, the Church has allowed the greatest stumbling block to be put in the path of the believer -- the demand for growth without the support of community.... We must enter into the kind of relationships with people that allows them to see our hearts. We need to be people who can speak authoritatively into each others lives and not merely offer a barrage of Bible verses and Christian clichés. We need to be the kind of community that knows the depths of the ugliness of each other's lives and yet sees each other in love, in trust, and with the heart of a brother or sister.”³

While the entire spectrum of the Church is involved, the inner circle is the place where formation is most likely to be carried out. It is the place where all our rough places rub up against our brother's or sister's rough places. God uses the Bible, wielded by the Holy Spirit, together with day to day life in the Church to smooth out rough spots.

“Reading the Bible with others does not mean only that we read together in a small group, or that we read commentaries to benefit from the wisdom of great teachers, or that we listen to the Bible read and reflected on in worship or other gatherings. It also means reading the Bible through the lens of others' experiences, in the knowledge of others' stories, in the midst of immersion in others' lives.... We read with others to feed our souls and activate our conscience, to be formed, conformed, and transformed. This spiritual formation happens in the crucible of life together....”⁴ Foster

Three cords are better than one

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NIV) ¹² Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

We have looked at the three tools or “informers” that we are to carry with us on our journey. There are limitations to the use of each one.

1. The Bible is infallible, but our interpretation is not.
2. The Holy Spirit is perfect, but our hearing and understanding is not.
3. The Church is not perfect and neither is our understanding.

Therefore we need to use all the tools, all the “informers,” as we seek to be conformed to the image of Christ. We do not need to pit one against the other, or to diminish the role of one or another. We need all three in order to best grow in Christ and be conformed to His image. It is by submitting in humility to the shaping of all three informers together that we grow best. These tools together will help us to visit many spiritual lands that will shape us as followers of Christ.

Questions

1. What would be your definition of “a” church?
2. Which metaphor for the Church is most meaningful to you? Why?
3. For you personally, what would you consider to be your church
 - A. Family?
 - B. Community?
 - C. Nation?
 - D. World?
4. How did you decide which Bible you think is the right one? (Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, etc.)
5. How can you learn to listen to each of the circles of the Church as you read for information?
6. How have you seen the Church work with the Bible in your life for formation?
7. How do you see the three “informers” working together in your life? Is one more dominant than another? Why?

Prayer/Application

Pray together that your group would be used as a tool of formation for each other. Pray for one another.

References

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) p. 38
2. Richard Foster with Kathryn A. Helmers. *Life with God, Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008) pp. 101
3. Kyle Strobel, *Metamorphia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007) p. 122–123
4. Foster, p. 105–106

Week 8: The Bible and Spiritual Disciplines

Open Up!

1. What is the most helpful thing you have learned during this study? Why?
2. When have you been most successful at consistently reading your Bible and praying? Why do you think you were successful?

Study

In this lesson we will

1. Review the prior lessons.
2. Define spiritual disciplines.
3. Explain how the disciplines work.
4. Explain the relationship of the Bible to the disciplines.

Looking back

We began this study with the concept that we have been given a passport to change. Let's review the places we have visited in our travel through this study.

Lesson 1 — It's Always Time for Change

1. Changing to the image of Christ is an essential part of the Christian life.
2. Change is a process over time.
3. We make a choice to embrace or reject change

Lesson 2 — Everything Needs to Change

1. Our minds need to change.
2. Our emotions and attitudes need to change.
3. Our behavior needs to change
4. Our relationships need to change.

Lesson 3 — How Do We Change?

1. God is the source of our change
2. There are three main tools or “informers” of change
 - a. The Bible
 - b. The Holy Spirit
 - c. The Church
3. We are partners with God in the process of change.
 - a. Hunger and Openness
 - b. Repentance
 - c. Faith/Faithfulness

Lesson 4 — The Bible: Food for the Journey

1. We need to read the Bible for formation not just information.
2. Our understanding of the Bible can be distorted by our cultural worldview.
3. We can minimize this distortion by
 - a. Humility.

- b. Recognizing the bias of our cultural worldview.
 - c. Considering the views of others outside our culture.
- 4. We put this into practice by recognizing that true change happens inwardly but we must also take outward action.

Lesson 5 -- Read and Pray: Talking to God with Your Mouth Full

- 1. Prayer and reading the Bible should be done together.
- 2. Reading the Bible and prayer are like having a conversational meal with God.
- 3. There are methods of prayer and Bible reading that can help us. We looked at two of these.
 - a. Use the Lord's Prayer as a model
 - b. Use the concept of "Spiritual Reading" (which we called RAP – read and pray)

Read	Meditate	Pray	Contemplate
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Lesson 6 -- The Bible and the Holy Spirit

- 1. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible.
- 2. The Holy Spirit is our guide in reading the Bible.
- 3. The Holy Spirit is the power of change in reading the Bible.
- 4. We need to be open to the Holy Spirit changing us as we read the Bible.

Lesson 7 – The Bible and the Church

- 1. A definition of the Church
 - a. The foundational Church - This is equivalent to what others call the universal Church.
 - b. The functional Church - This includes all the practical expressions of the Church from the smallest group up to denominations, the entire Church in the world today and even the traditions of the Church of the past.
- 2. The Church is different from the other two "informers" (the Bible and the Holy Spirit) in that it is not perfect but God has still chosen to use it.
- 3. The Bible cannot be separated from the Church because it is the tool God has used to recognize both the contents and the authority of the Bible.
- 4. The Church in its broad form can help us to interpret the Bible correctly by helping us to see the Bible through a lens other than our own cultural worldview.
- 5. The Church in its smallest expressions (the local church) is both the place where formation takes place and a tool that works with the Bible and the Holy Spirit to help us change.

That brings us to our final lesson about the Bible and Spiritual Disciplines.

What are the Spiritual Disciplines?

Richard Foster defines a spiritual discipline this way.

“A Spiritual Discipline is an intentionally directed action by which we do what we can do in order to receive from God the ability (or power) to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”¹

Basically, a spiritual discipline is an activity that we do on a regular, consistent, disciplined basis that will help us to change. The Bible does not give us a specific list of these activities, and so you will be able to find different lists of them. I will use those from Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* as an example here.²

Inward Disciplines	Outward Disciplines	Corporate Disciplines
Meditation Prayer Fasting Study	Simplicity Solitude Submission Service	Confession Worship Celebration Guidance

The general concept of disciplines is more important than the specific list. Some such as Prayer, Fasting and (Bible) Study will show up on everyone’s list, while others will depend on the particular perspective. The goal here is not to give a full teaching of these disciplines but to introduce the concept and encourage further exploration and study. Suggested reading will be given at the end of the lesson. The principles of this lesson are valid even if only applied to the Spiritual Disciplines of Bible reading and prayer that have been emphasized in this study.

How do the Spiritual Disciplines work?

1 Timothy 4:7 (NIV) ⁷ Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, *train yourself* to be godly.

There is a God-ordained means to becoming the kind of persons and the kind of communities that can fully and joyfully enter into such abundant living. And these “means” involve us in a process or intentionally “training... in godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7J). This is the purpose of the *Disciplines* of the spiritual life. Indeed, Scripture itself is the primary means for the discovery, instruction, and practice of the spiritual disciplines, which brings us all the more fully into the *with* God life.³

The grace of God

The very term Spiritual Disciplines immediately gives the impression that the emphasis is on what we do. So, it is important to understand that it is God that makes the disciplines effective in bringing about change in our lives. We should also understand that it is by God’s grace that we are able to practice the Spiritual Disciplines.

“You see, we are not just saved by grace; we live by grace. And we pray by grace and fast by grace and study by grace and serve by grace and worship by grace. All the

Disciplines are permeated by the enabling grace of God.”⁴

Foster

There are some points to remember in practicing Spiritual Disciplines.

1. Spiritual Disciplines do not earn God’s favor. They are a response to His love. (Romans 11:6, Galatians 3:1–3, Ephesians 2:8)
2. Spiritual Disciplines are a tool. They are not the goal. The goal is to be conformed to the image of Christ.
3. Practicing Spiritual Disciplines is not a reason for pride. It does not make us better than others. (Romans 12:3, 10)

Our part

Luke 13:24 (NIV) ²⁴ *Make every effort* to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

2 Peter 1:5–7 (NIV) ⁵ For this very reason, *make every effort* to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

These scriptures seem to contradict others which emphasize that we cannot earn our way in heaven or change ourselves by our own efforts. Once more we see paradox. Remember from prior lessons that God has chosen to make us a partner in the process.

Lesson 1 — We make a choice to embrace or reject change

Lesson 3 — We are partners with God in the process of change by:

- a) Hunger and Openness
- b) Repentance
- c) Faith/Faithfulness

God **will not** force us to change or force us to practice the Spiritual Disciplines. He **will** give us the grace to carry them out. Grace does not mean that we do not participate.

“Grace never means inaction or total passivity. In ordinary life we will encounter multiple moments of decision where we must engage the will saying, ‘Yes!’ to God’s will and to God’s way as the people of God have been challenged throughout history. The opposite of grace is works, but not effort... ‘Works’ have to do with earning, and there is simply nothing any of us can do to earn God’s love or acceptance.... But if we ever hope to ‘grow in grace,’ we will find ourselves engaging in effort of the most strenuous kind.”⁵

Foster

There are two dangers (or competing tensions) in practicing Spiritual Disciplines. One is that we will get caught up in our part and become “legalistic” or Pharisees. We stress the “work” of Spiritual Disciplines and think either that we have accomplished something or that we are better than others. We can become hypocrites by practicing outwardly what we are not on the inside. Or, we can condemn ourselves due to the failure of practicing them. On the other side we can so emphasize the grace of God that we use it as an excuse to do nothing. We don’t practice anything spiritual because we don’t want to be a hypocrite.

The answer is not to emphasize one tension over the other but to allow them to work together. In Lesson 2, as we talked about changed behavior, we emphasized that while it is important that change is inward, it must be expressed outwardly. Sometimes we must act outwardly by faith before there has been an inward change. Spiritual Disciplines must be practiced as an act of faith in the God of grace.

What about the Bible?

How does the Bible relate to the Spiritual Disciplines? There is no Spiritual Discipline that does not have the Bible at its core. Any discipline that does not have a biblical foundation must be suspect.

Bible reading and prayer are the most basic of the Spiritual Disciplines.

They will be included in all (and are at the top of most) Christian lists of Spiritual Disciplines. Christians from every tradition agree that Bible reading and prayer are an essential part of Christian life. At their essence, Bible reading and prayer are our conversation with God and, therefore, the heart of our relationship with Him.

The Bible is an essential part of every discipline.

Every discipline either incorporates the Bible directly in its practice or uses biblical principles to guide the practice. It could be argued that all the other disciplines flow out of the discipline of Bible reading and prayer. They form our relationship with God and everything else comes out of that relationship. It is also true that the disciplines help us to read the Bible since every discipline brings us full circle back to the Bible. Just as the Bible is an essential part of every discipline, every discipline based on the Bible will work with it to change us.

Passport to Change

You have your passport. You have the tools to take with you on your journey. It’s up to you. Do you want to travel? Do you want to change? It’s time to get your passport stamped as you travel through and with your Bible. An exciting journey of faith and adventure awaits you if you’ll just take the first step. May God bless in you your travels in a life of changing to be like Christ.

Questions

1. What is your experience with Spiritual Disciplines? If possible, name a specific result in your life that came from practicing a Spiritual Discipline.
2. What do you think Paul means when he writes to Timothy to “train yourself to be godly”?
3. Foster says, “All the Disciplines are permeated by the enabling grace of God.” Explain what you think that means.
4. What does it mean when the Bible says “make every effort”?
5. Which do you think is the biggest danger for you in practicing the Spiritual Disciplines — that you would become legalistic or that you would rely on the grace of God and not make any effort? Why?
6. Look at Foster’s list of disciplines on page 6. How do you think the Bible would relate to each of those?
7. Where are you on your journey with your passport? How could the rest of your group help you on your journey?

Prayer/Application

Pray together specifically in response to your discussion of question 7 above. Ask God to help you know how to support each other in your journey of change? Pray regarding any ideas that came up during your discussion. Ask God to give you the grace you need.

References

1. Richard Foster with Kathryn A. Helmers. *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008.) p. 16
2. Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1998)
3. Foster, *Life with God*, p. 13
4. Ibid, p. 18–19
5. Ibid, p. 19

Recommended Reading

- *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* by Richard Foster with Kathryn Helmers.
- *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* and also *Simplify Your Spiritual Life (Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed)* both by Donald Whitney
- *Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* by Dallas Willard
- *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* by Adele Calhoun

The two books by Foster set the standard in my opinion. Whitney writes from a Southern Baptist perspective. Sacred Rhythms is probably the easiest reading of the group.

APPENDIX C

BOOKMARK AND FIVE DAY CHALLENGE

Bookmark (Actual size was 2 ½ x 8 ½ inches)

Front

The Lord's Prayer as Your Model
Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV)

This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

Begin your prayer time by thanking God for being your Father. Praise Him and focus on His goodness, holiness and power. Prayer is first and foremost relational. The entire prayer is founded on our relationship to God as Father.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Pray for God's will in

 Yourself - Your family - Your church - Your city, state, nation

Give us today our daily bread.

Pray for specific needs in your life and those around you.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Ask God's forgiveness and decide to forgive others.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,

Put on the whole armor of God. Pray through Ephesians 6:10-17. Ask for help in areas of temptation.

For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

End your prayer time by reaffirming God's goodness, holiness and power. Begin and end in praise to Him.

Back

RAP -Read and Pray
A 10-15 minute Spiritual Exercise

CHOOSE the passage of Scripture that you wish to read and pray.

READ

- READ the Scripture
- Gather information & understanding
- Listen to God's Word
- What word or phrase speaks to you?
- Allow 1-2 minutes quiet time

MEDITATE

- Read the Scripture again
- Think and REFLECT upon the passage
- Allow Christ to speak to you personally
- What is the Lord saying to you?
- Allow 4-5 minutes quiet time

PRAY

- Read the Scripture again
- Let your heart RESPOND to God
- Talk with God about the passage
- What do you want to say to God?
- Allow 3-4 minutes quiet time

CONTEMPLATE

- Read the Scripture a final time
- Surrender yourself to God
- REST in God's loving presence
- Allow 2-3 minutes quiet time
- Conclude with the Lord's Prayer

Five Day Challenge (actual size)



Take the Five Day Challenge — Read & Pray

RAP 5 times and get started with your Spiritual Discipline!

Will you commit to RAP 5 days between now and next Sunday?

We will help you! Use the guide in your bulletin to Read and Pray. You can use either the guide to RAP or the Lord's Prayer as model. (We suggest that you alternate days.)

Use the Scriptures (NIV) below (or you can choose your own.)

Day 1 —Romans 12:1-2 ¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Day 2 —Romans 8:28-29 ²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Day 3 —Galatians 3:2-6 ²I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ⁴Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing? ⁵Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? ⁶Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Day 4—Ezekiel 2:8-10 ⁸But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." ⁹Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, ¹⁰which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. ¹And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." ²So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

Day 5 —John 16:13-15 ¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.



APPENDIX D

THE TEXT OF THE *LECTIO DIVINA* RECORDING

Introduction

Take a moment as I introduce this time to read and pray to become quiet and clear your mind of distractions. While you will do this exercise together as a group, the group should not be a distraction. Your focus is on the Scripture that is read and the Holy Spirit that prompts your heart.

For many years most Christians heard the word of God rather than read it. Listening to God's word is a normal way for it to be experienced. Sacred Reading or in this case listening has been used throughout Church history to help Christians read and hear the Bible in a way that helps us to be conformed to the image of Christ. The process consists of four parts or movements as you have learned in your study. Each part begins with the reading or hearing of the selected Scripture passage. The NIV will be used for these readings. You may choose to just listen to the reader or you may use your Bible to read for yourself after you have heard the reader. Music will provide background for your quiet time. Remember that this is a process. Do not try to judge the quality of your time. Trust that God is in control and will accomplish His purpose.

First Reading

Listen as I read Isaiah 40:27–31 several times. Listen for the still small voice in a word or phrase that somehow says, I am for you today. Listen quietly for the words or phrase God has chosen for you.

Isaiah 40:27–31 (NIV)

²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God”?

²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

(Approximately 4 minutes of music)

Second Reading

Listen again as I read. This time take the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories and ideas. Think and reflect on the passage. Allow Christ to speak to you personally. What is he saying to you?

(Read Isaiah 40:27–31 again for the recording)

(Approximately 4 minutes of music)

Third Reading

Listen to the words once more. This time let your heart respond to God. Talk with him about the passage. Give to Him what you have discovered in yourself during your time of meditation. Tell him the things that the passage has awakened in your heart.

(Read Isaiah 40:27–31 again for the recording)

(Approximately 4 minutes of music)

Fourth Reading

As you listen for the final time, surrender yourself to God. Rest in his loving presence. When He invites you, return to your dialogue with Him. Consider his word to you and your response. Rejoice in the knowledge that He is with you in both words and silence. He will continue to go with you as you leave this quiet time.

(Read Isaiah 40:27–31 again for the recording)

(Approximately 4 minutes of music)

Closing

(Read Isaiah 40:27–31 again for the recording)

(Pause briefly before reciting the Lord's Prayer.)

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as *it is* in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

APPENDIX E

Evaluation Questionnaire

1. Do you feel that the material was or will be helpful for your group as they grow as Christians? Explain.
2. What did you like best (or find most helpful) about the lessons? Explain
3. What did you like least about the lessons? Explain.
4. Was the general format of the lessons helpful or was it confusing? (Placing the instructor notes around the student book) Explain.
5. Was the amount of material covered in the lessons: (circle one)
 - a. The right amount
 - b. Too much
 - c. Not enough

Comments:

6. Was the language and content of the lessons: (circle one)
 - a. Too difficult
 - b. Too easy
 - c. Just right

Comments:

7. Please give any other suggestions or comments you think would be helpful.

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