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RECLAIMING THE MINISTRY OF TEACHING IN THE MISSIONAL SETTING

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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ABSTRACT

Reclaiming the Ministry of Teaching in the Missional Setting

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The dynamics of postmodernism and American secularism make Christ's Great Commission difficult to fulfill. A thorough study of Matthew 28:18-20 establishes that the mandate is still valid, and that missional communities must get creative in fulfilling it. Mindful that the command to make disciples is accomplished by both baptism and teaching, this paper argues that Christians would be more effective if they taught unbelievers before their conversions. The engagement with the unchurched, de-churched, and religiously allergic is termed "missional teaching" and is carried out through informal but informative conversation.

This paper examines the apparent resistance to missional teaching coming both from the target group of the unchurched and potential teachers themselves. The San Francisco Bay Area is highlighted as a microcosm of the larger missional context. It was found that certain major shifts in attitude and method would enable churches to overcome their mental and institutional objections to missional teaching. To do so, however, the bridge between the Kingdom of God and the "world of the unchurched" must be crossed. The most important shift, described at length, is replacing traditional teaching paradigms with creative alternatives suggested by experiential, dialogic, and subject-centered learning theories. Applying Scripture and educational theory to the problem, this paper proposes a general framework for missional teaching in informal settings, "third places," promoting three models: apprenticeship, storytelling, and the joint adventure.

The paper reports the result of collaboration with the Northern California site of Fuller Theological Seminary to equip missional leaders for the work of the Kingdom. Missional qualities and skills were identified and a course designed and taught to develop them in Bay Area Fuller students. The experiment demonstrates that theological education has a contribution to make toward improved missional teaching, if it translates theory into practice and enables individuals to improvise in the missional setting.

Content Reader: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

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INTRODUCTION

The generation of Americans growing up in the 1950s and 1960s (and their parents) might remember the weekly television program of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen called *Life Is Worth Living*. The winsome bishop taught Catholic values and addressed moral issues of his day to an audience of ten million viewers at the peak of his popularity. During this era, the Reverend Billy Graham also had risen to prominence as an international evangelist. For fifty years, his message was conveyed through a weekly radio program called *Hour of Decision* and reinforced by televised crusades and newspaper columns. These teachers of the gospel were generally revered and their messages respected even by those who would not identify themselves as believers. Through them, Americans were exposed to the basic content of the gospel delivered with integrity, humility, and conviction.

Meanwhile, Church membership in the United States peaked in several denominations in approximately 1965, coinciding with the birth of the Baby Boom generation. While youth ministries, by necessity, flourished and parachurch organizations such as Campus Crusade and InterVarsity were founded, demand for church-based Sunday school for adults also surged. New published curricula became available, such as the *Bethel Series* (by Lutheran minister Harley Swiggum in 1961) and publications from Gospel Light (founded by Presbyterian Henrietta Mears in 1933). Meanwhile, in the secular realm, educational theorists such as Jean Piaget, Malcolm Knowles, and James Fowler were contributing their seminal theories on cognitive development, the special issues related to adult education, and the unique dynamics of faith development. Out of

the confluence of these events and trends, small group materials were published starting in the 1970s, making Bible study accessible to anyone.

In the decades since this resurgence in traditional Christian education for adults, the landscape in the Western United States has changed considerably. Religious and spiritual practice in twenty-first century North America has been reduced to what Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton call “moralistic therapeutic deism,” and teaching is perceived to be equivalent to force-feeding geese for *foie gras*.¹ This paper observes those broad religious dynamics within a discrete region, the San Francisco Bay Area, to consider how missional communities emerging from the Church might regain the respect of a population that has widely rejected organized religion.

My interest in this subject is long-standing. I have been a resident of the Bay Area almost from the time of my commitment to Christ in 1970. From the earliest days of God’s claim on my life, I was conscious of a ministerial call and gifting to teach. From 1980 to 1986 at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California, I served the adult discipleship and equipping department, specializing in small group leadership development and Bible study, including the teacher training for the *Bethel Series*. Upon my ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1987, I became the associate pastor at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church in Moraga, California, responsible for ministry to adults, including the traditional designation of Christian education. As senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California, from 1997 to 2006, I oversaw a staff that included an associate for adult ministries and cast a vision for making, mentoring,

¹ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-70.

and mobilizing loving followers of Jesus Christ. Since 2006 I have served informally at Saint Matthew Lutheran Church in Walnut Creek, California, as a teaching pastor. The subject of Christian teaching has been my calling and passion for thirty years. While sensitive to the possibility that I have overemphasized the spiritual gift of teaching, nonetheless, I have come to the conclusion that the ministry of teaching has been underutilized in the churches where I have served, if not in the Church at large. It is my belief that when a church rearranges its priorities to quiet the teaching/learning dynamic within the congregation, it is abdicating its responsibility to obey everything Jesus has commanded (Mt 28:20 NRSV).²

A recent attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of adult Christian education was undertaken by the 2007 Willow Creek *Reveal* study.³ This effort fostered a positive, active discussion around what constitutes effective spiritual formation. However, despite its finding that spiritual growth is not produced by keeping congregants busy at church, the study still measures success by the level of involvement in church programs. Educational ministry in the missional setting, as distinct from the church setting, needs its own evaluation and a new set of recommendations. This dissertation proposes a biblical framework, educational theory, and ministry methods to inform a new kind of teaching for those unreached by traditional church programs.

Any Christian disciple wishing to conduct ministry in the missional setting—that is, incarnationally among those outside the cultural circle of church fellowship—does

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. All scriptural references are taken from this translation unless otherwise noted.

³ Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *REVEAL: Where Are You?* (Chicago: Willow Creek Community Church, 2007).

well to put the Great Commission of Jesus into practice (Mt 28:18-20). Jesus' command raises an important question for twenty-first century Christians, pastors, and teaching elders: Would the Church be more effective in fulfilling the Great Commission if it were to teach potential disciples in the missional setting, before their conversion and baptism, to obey everything Jesus has told them? This paper demonstrates that Christians can be more effective in making disciples if they adopt teaching methods that engage not-yet disciples in a new personalized, life-shaping learning process.

The question is an important one on several levels. First of all, it takes all three parts of the Great Commission—make disciples, baptize, teach—seriously. It also charges the Church to pay careful attention to two means of making of new disciples, their incorporation into the community of faith through baptism, and their instruction in that faith as a matter of ongoing practice.

Second, the question addresses the relationship between teaching and making disciples in current American church practice, and how teaching can be or become an effective evangelistic tool in the missional setting. This relationship must be examined from two angles: teaching/learning as preparation to become a disciple, and teaching/learning as an ongoing discipline after a person has been incorporated into the Body of Christ. The question of whether Christ intended teaching to be a necessary part of gospel proclamation and evangelism is itself very significant for shaping missional ministry.

Third, the question urges the Church to evaluate its current teaching methods for their feasibility and effectiveness in the missional setting, where potential new disciples reside, work, and play. After establishing the goal of missional teaching, the matter of what constitutes an effective teacher can be addressed. The objectives of missional

teaching may surprise practitioners in the traditional ways of adult Sunday school, especially those who deem a class successful simply because people attend it.

Fourth, the question challenges the Church to find new ways to teach the faith so that the current generation, with all its foibles and philosophies, can learn and benefit from it. Methods that were effective in first-century Palestine may not be as effective today, but variations of them may in fact engender a new receptivity among postmodern and “religiously allergic” people. The question requires Christians to review the content of their lessons, examine and appreciate the characteristics of their target audience, and then build a methodological bridge between lesson and learner appropriately.

Fifth, the question assumes that current teaching practice has largely failed to produce informed new disciples and, therefore, Christian teachers must be equipped to teach differently than they have been doing for the last sixty years. Devising effective methods is one challenge, but the most creative method in the hands of an ill-equipped teacher is unlikely to make its mark. Therefore, equipping missional teachers for the work of the Kingdom is an essential assignment in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Sixth, and finally, the question requires the Church to admit and to face the possible consequences of not teaching in the mission setting, among those who have yet to make a commitment to Christ. Those consequences—observed already in urban centers in the West—include biblical illiteracy and inhospitality to the gospel. These outcomes could endanger the future of the Church itself if its disciples are grounded less effectively and therefore susceptible to deviations from the true gospel.

The goal of this paper is to analyze the requirements of the Great Commission to make disciples by teaching them to obey everything Jesus has told them. Part One will delve into the meaning of the Matthew 28:18-20 text, concluding that the teaching ministry is necessary throughout the entire process of making disciples, from first introduction of the gospel to lifelong learning of how to follow Christ. Examples from the ministry of Jesus himself and the first generation of apostles in the early Church context will illustrate the necessity of culturally sensitive missional teaching in anticipation of conversion and baptism.

Part Two takes the experience and insight of the first century to the present, postulating that the Church today must also take the teaching office seriously if it is to see missional progress in the current religious climate. If potential disciples are to become what Dallas Willard, in *The Divine Conspiracy*, calls “apprentices to Jesus,” they must learn how to love God with all their hearts, souls, minds, and strength (Mk 12:30).⁴ Courage of Christian teachers is required to tackle this challenging task, as it means addressing the resistance of both teacher and potential learner. It also means forsaking the comfort-zone of the attractional church model and stepping out incarnationally into the community to establish relationships in which consideration of Jesus Christ’s claims and promises can be examined and perhaps experienced. If this mindset shift can occur in Christian teachers, then they are in a better position to pitch their tents among their mission fields: neighbors, friends, strangers, the religiously allergic, and those Alan Hirsch, in his book, *The Forgotten Ways*, calls “the de-churched” (those who had

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 276.

previous exposure to the church and still refer to its cultural assumptions despite their separation from it, as opposed to the truly unchurched who have had no church experience).⁵ Part Two concludes by outlining one method of linking God's Story to the stories of potential disciples, by connecting their heart-cries and deepest questions to some point in the biblical metanarrative.

Part Three turns to methodology and equipping of potential missional teachers. There are many ways to teach, and these ways are amply illustrated in both the Old and New Testaments. The various means employed throughout biblical history to teach about God and to practice holiness enliven the vision of instructional possibilities today. Educational theorists such as Daniel Kolb, Jane Vella, and Parker Palmer in recent years have emphasized experiential learning, learning through dialogue, and subject-centered learning, all of which are consistent with the biblical goal of life transformation. In the end, this paper will narrow the focus to three particular methods—apprentice relationships, storytelling as truth-telling, and adventure guidance—and chart a plan for equipping students at the Northern California site of Fuller Theological Seminary (hereafter, Fuller Northern California) to employ these teaching methods missionally.

By considering the urgency and importance of Christ's command and exploring its implications, the hope is that the Church will be encouraged to exercise new creativity in the teaching/learning dynamic. If pastors, church educators, elders, and teaching ministers would willingly experiment with new ways of teaching, the Church might discover additional possibilities for making disciples who are informed, committed, and

⁵ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 63.

trusting Jesus and his Way. One day, it is hoped, the teaching ministry of God's people will not be seen as a way to maintain a safe status quo in church, but as an important aspect of incarnational Kingdom living that turns this world upside down (Acts 17:6).

PART ONE

MISSION

CHAPTER 1

THE GREAT COMMISSION: ITS PARTS AND EARLY PRACTICE

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 was Christ’s pivotal instruction to the disciples after his resurrection from the dead: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” This command provides the starting point for considering teaching in the missional setting. It is not the first relevant reference in the New Testament to the role of teaching in spreading the faith, but it holds an important and unique place in the life of the Church.

Matthew’s Distinctive Emphases

Matthew makes this command the last word in his account. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, in their commentary, state, “One expects much from an ending, and in this Matthew meets expectations.”¹ Its position underscores its immense importance.

¹ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28, International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark International, 2004), 678.

Similarly, in Mark, Luke, and even John, words of commissioning appear in the post-resurrection period, before Jesus had ascended into heaven. In those cases, however, the wording is simplified and focuses primarily upon a proclamation ministry. Mark writes, “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and *proclaim* the good news to the whole creation’” (Mk 16:15, emphasis added). Luke states, “And he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins *is to be proclaimed* in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are *witnesses* of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high’” (Lk 24:46–49, emphasis added). And John writes, “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you’” (Jn 20:21). Matthew’s rendition is unique in its all-encompassing task, underscored by his repetition of “all” through the text: all authority, all the nations, all of God (Father, Son, Spirit), all that [Jesus] has commanded, always.

In contrast to the other gospels, Matthew’s version is also noted for what Dale Bruner, in his commentary, calls its “sandwich structure.” Jesus begins and ends the Commission with the declaration of his authority (verse 18) and promise of his abiding presence (verse 20). In the middle, the commands to go, evangelize, engraft, and educate highlight the ongoing nature of the call not only to make Christ known but also to invite others into covenant community around him.²

² Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13–28*, vol. 2 of *Matthew: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 804.

Mark, Luke, and John's commissioning passages present the teacher-centered goal of proclaiming the gospel. Matthew presents Jesus articulating what educators call student-centered and subject-centered goals.³ It can be demonstrated that all four gospels ultimately point to the Subject (Jesus) in their commissioning statements, but Matthew's version more explicitly identifies the measurable results expected in budding disciples: they will become disciples of Jesus Christ, they will be baptized into the community of faith around the truth of the gospel, and they will learn to obey everything that Jesus taught. Though broad in their implications, these three objectives point to specific areas where spiritual transformation will take place: in primary loyalty, in social network, and in knowledge and daily practice. Consistent with Matthew's three-in-one commission, Brad Kallenberg, in his book, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age*, identifies three essential changes that together are required for spiritual conversion: a change in social identity, acquisition of a new conceptual language, and a paradigm shift to a God-centered worldview.⁴ This observation will become important as the subject of missional teaching is developed in Part Two.

The Challenge to Make Disciples

Matthew takes great care to define the primary assignment as making disciples. Then he expands on how that is to be done: 1) baptizing disciples into the community of

³ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 10th anniv. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 119. The concept of learning objectives is ubiquitous in educational theory. Teacher-centered goals are stated in terms of what the teacher does (proclaim, declare, be witnesses), and student-centered goals focus on how the learners will change and grow as a result of learning activities. Palmer explores the differences between the teacher-centered, student-centered, and his preferred subject-centered classroom.

⁴ Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 31-46.

faith, and 2) teaching them obedience that characterizes the lifestyle of a disciple-making fellowship. The double command to “go and [do something]” is common in Matthew’s gospel: “Go and search for the child” (2:8); “go and learn” (9:13); “go and proclaim” (10:7); “go and tell John” (11:4); “go and cast a hook” (17:27); and “go and tell” (28:7). “Go and make disciples” states the command under which baptizing and teaching are organized.⁵ The relationship of these three activities is illustrated in figure 1.

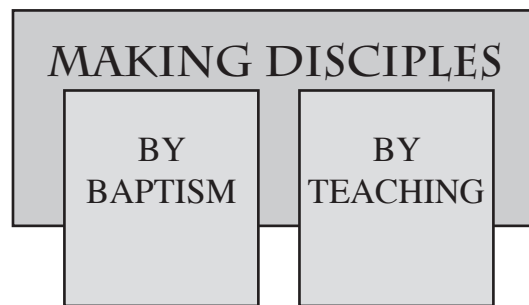


Figure 1. Three-in-One Commission

By saying “go,” Jesus assumes that from that place and time—huddled with the postresurrection Jesus prior to his ascension—his followers will be departing for somewhere: home, back to Jerusalem, or to a new way of life. But the complete command is to “go and make disciples of all nations,” sending them more grandly and specifically into a new phase of redemptive activity in the name of the Father, Son, and

⁵ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 136. According to Ferguson, πορευθέντες (“go”), an aorist passive participle, gets its force from the main verb μαθητεύσατε (“make disciples”). Baptizing and teaching, as “participles of means,” elaborate on how the double command “Go and make disciples” is to be carried out. In contrast, see *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 1521. Its study note for Mt 28:19-20 indicates that the Great Commission is “Christ’s program of mission . . . involving three sequential steps (1) ‘go,’ (2) ‘baptizing them’ and (3) ‘teaching them to obey everything’ Christ has commanded.”

Holy Spirit. This ongoing activity and the lifestyle of the faith community will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

Delegated Authority

The staggering scope of the Great Commission is made possible by the authority of Jesus Christ, who had already exerted practical authority throughout his ministry: “The crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Mt 7:28f). On a later occasion, after Jesus forgave the sins of a paralytic, some scribes accused him of blasphemy, but he substantiated his claim of spiritual authority with healing action: “Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Stand up and walk”? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he then said to the paralytic—‘Stand up, take your bed and go to your home’” (Mt 9:3-6). Jesus gained substantial credibility with his disciples when he commanded the Galilean storm to cease. The amazed disciples asked, “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?” (Mt 8:23-27). So, now at the end of his ministry, with his full authority and influence behind him, Jesus assigned the apostles an enormous task: make disciples of all nations. The Great Commission might have seemed incomprehensible if not impossible, but Jesus was offering reassurance that he would not give his followers challenging mandates without also giving them the power of his presence to accomplish them: “I will be with you even to the end of the age.” One must draw the conclusion, from the scope of the task and the resources available to accomplish it, that this delegation of responsibility is of utmost importance.

The Three Parts of the Three-in-One Challenge

Jesus presented his closest followers with a three-in-one challenge: to make disciples, by baptizing them into the faith, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus had commanded, as illustrated by figure 1. “Go and make disciples” is to be accomplished by baptizing them in the name of the Trinity and teaching them to obey. The overall command followed by the two participles “baptizing” and “teaching” urges a lifestyle of incorporating new believers not only into a way of thinking but into a way of life in community with other believers. In other words, welcoming newcomers through the rite of baptism is to be a practice of the discipling and teaching community. As these three charges are explored below, the role of teaching in the process of making disciples will be highlighted. In Part Two, the appropriateness or even necessity of teaching not-yet disciples before their conversion will be discussed.

Make Disciples

“Make disciples of all nations” is, by virtue of its verb tense, an urgent and concrete imperative rather than an unspecific suggestion to disciple the nations.⁶ The later implies an ongoing maintenance activity of the Church without a clear measurable goal. Making disciples points to a measurable outcome achieved by a particular process done in a timely fashion. Jesus was commanding his followers to start making new disciples

⁶ Michael Markowski, “Teachers in Early Christianity,” *Journal on Research in Christian Education* 17, no. 2 (July 2008): 136-52, n1. μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη employs the aorist active imperative form (second person, plural) and therefore supports the common reading of “make disciples of all nations” instead of “disciple the nations.”

“right now,” and not just among Jews but among people of every ethnicity, land, and culture.

It is instructive to explore the meaning of “disciple.” According to Rengstorf’s article in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, the term in New Testament usage refers to one who believes in Jesus Christ, submits to his authority by obeying him, dedicates himself to Christ’s service, suffers with and for Christ, and gives witness to Christ’s Lordship.⁷ A disciple of Jesus does not merely learn the content of his teaching, but attaches to Christ as personal Lord. Willard describes this relationship as between a master and an apprentice: “[A disciple is] someone who has decided to be with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is.”⁸ A Christian disciple does not only learn about Jesus, but has entered a personal, dependent, and obedient relationship with him in order to be like him. The proclamation of early apostles and evangelists testified to the person and work of Jesus Christ, not merely to the content of his teaching. Similarly, E. Stanley Jones, long-time Methodist missionary to India, differentiates between “the Word become flesh” (Christ embodied in the believer and godly action) and “the Word become words” (Christ as a concept).⁹ Those who believe in Jesus embody the gospel rather than just talk about it. The understanding of this dichotomy is critically important to the dynamic of disciples making disciples, which will be described in Part Two.

⁷ K. H. Rengstorf, “μαθητης,” in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 447-48.

⁸ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 282.

⁹ E. Stanley Jones, *The Word Became Flesh* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1963), 7.

Make Disciples by Baptizing

The second phrase of the Great Commission, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” denotes an ongoing action that is one means of making disciples.¹⁰ The New Testament does not describe baptism as an end—the climax of an effort after which the disciple-making process ceases—but as the symbolic threshold between the old life before conversion and the new life in Christ and in covenant community. The imagery of baptism is dramatic, symbolizing the death of the old self by immersion (burial) in the water and the resurrection to new life as one is lifted out of the water. In the book of Acts, the trigger for conferring baptism was a profession of belief in Jesus Christ. For example, three thousand people who “gladly received Peter’s word” (his first sermon on Pentecost) were baptized and added to the community of faith (Acts 2:41). Similarly, after Philip explained the Scriptures to the Ethiopian eunuch, he believed in the Messiah, and he raised the urgent and significant question: “Is there any reason why I should not be baptized right now?” Seeing no impediment, Philip baptized him in a pond by the side of the road (Acts 8:37).

It is not the intent of this paper to explore all the rich meanings and theological implications of baptism, except in relation to the ministry of teaching and making disciples. Christ’s followers would be remiss in their obligation if they merely proclaimed the gospel message to new believers without extending an invitation into the family of faith and sealing that new relationship with the sacrament. The command to baptize highlights a new social identity that is essential to growing as a disciple.

¹⁰ The Greek reads, “βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.” The word βαπτίζοντες (“baptizing”) is a present active participle.

Make Disciples by Teaching Obedience

Referring back to figure 1, the third part of the Great Commission is “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”¹¹ “Teaching them to obey” accompanies “baptizing them in the Name . . .” as the dual and simultaneous means for making disciples.¹² Matthew’s version of Jesus’ last instruction commanded the disciples to teach potential Christ-followers with the goal that they would receive baptism, join the covenant community of faith, and adopt a lifestyle conforming to Jesus’ commands. This teaching is bold not only because of its content—everything Jesus commanded—but also in the exhortation to obey those commands. In our skeptical, religiously allergic twenty-first century, one already has to overcome a significant mental hurdle to be willing to explain the teachings of Jesus to an unbeliever, but presenting these teachings as requirements to be obeyed is another hurdle many are unwilling or unable to clear in this age of questioning authority.

The passage suggests rather strongly that built into the disciple-making process is some level of accountability for doctrine and behavior. A good example of someone held accountable in a way that led to personal change is found in Ephesus in Acts 18, where Apollos from Alexandria is recognized to be teaching accurately and enthusiastically about Jesus. However, Priscilla and Aquila (protégés of Paul) observe that he has not been baptized in the name of Jesus, and they detect an inadequacy in his teaching. In his commentary on Acts, I. Howard Marshall notes the personal discipling that was

¹¹ Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 477-78. Smyth identifies διδάσκοντες αὐτοῦς as another “circumstantial participle of means,” just like βαπτίζοντες (“baptizing”).

¹² Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 137.

necessary to correct: “Priscilla and Aquila recognized the short-comings in [Apollos’] understanding of the faith and took him aside privately so that he might have a yet more accurate understanding of the faith. . . . The teaching he received was effective, and the Christians in Ephesus gained a full confidence in Apollos.”¹³ At its best, the disciple-making fellowship is a place where the truth can be spoken in love, encouraging spiritual maturity that withstands the winds of false doctrine (Eph 4:14–5).

Teaching people to obey Jesus’ commands does not equate with a requirement that a potential disciple live those commands perfectly before baptism and church membership can be imparted. As Christian teachers lift up and exemplify the Way of Christ, and as individuals respond in repentance and intention to reform their lives toward it, the Church promotes an aspiration of the Christlike life. Perfection is not required for baptism. However, spiritual progress, made possible by the indwelling Spirit’s power, is encouraged by a shared value taught and practiced in covenant community. This aspiration points to content of the teaching, which will be taken up in greater detail in Part Two. Suffice it to say now, shaping disciples and helping them grow spiritually requires not only doctrine (in order to understand the things of God) but also ethics (in order to navigate through life in godliness and wisdom).

Disciple-making through Teaching in the First Century

Teaching was an essential part of the early Christian movement, and there was no shyness about directing it toward unbelievers. Jesus’ famous sermons on mount and plain cast wide nets. Acts records the ever-broader appeal of the gospel as apostles fanned out

¹³ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, in *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 304.

from Jerusalem into “Samaria, Judea, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The basic information about the Kingdom of God, its breakthrough in the person of Jesus Christ, and the fulfillment of the prophecies of old was taught throughout the ancient Near East to new hearers.

Jesus Taught the Uninitiated

One only has to look at the life and example of Jesus himself to realize that his announcement, “the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17), was new information to everyone. At the time of his appearance as an itinerant preacher, no one was yet a “Christian” believer, but those who responded to his message were soon aware that he was the Christ (Mt 16:13-17), watching him in action through the lens of the Law and the Prophets. He said he was sent “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24), but he made exceptions to this rule. Jesus made a regular practice of teaching people, Jew and Gentile, before they believed, in order to make known to them their choices. He had informative conversations with outsiders like the stubborn Canaanite woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon (Mt 15:21-28), the troubled Roman centurion in Capernaum (Mt 8:5-13), and the curious Samaritan woman at the well in Samaria (Jn 4:4-42). He took on the hostile Pharisees (e.g. Lk 11:37-54) and spared no words in exposing their hypocrisy and legalism tantamount to unbelief. He taught small groups as he traveled from town to village throughout Galilee (Mk 6:6-12). Dramatically, Jesus captivated the attention of large crowds with the Sermon on the Mount and outlined a New Covenant reading of the Law: “You have heard it said . . . but I say to you” (Mt 5-7). Jesus taught

anyone who would listen because this was the way to get the message out, broadcast a new worldview, and invite people to a response of faith and trust in him.

Teaching Was the Apostles' Central Activity

Carrying the message forward after Pentecost, in the spirit of the Great Commission, the Apostle Peter immediately engaged in teaching receptive large crowds (e.g. Pentecost day, Acts 2:14-42), while the brothers fanned out to teach small groups of new disciples (Acts 2:42), hostile interrogators (Acts 7), and individuals in private conversation, such as between Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:23-33). In the Acts accounts, there appear to be three key components of becoming a new disciple: instruction in the faith, belief in Jesus as Lord, and baptism, not necessarily in this order. In the early days of the Church, these three elements occurred within a relatively short time-span, with instruction in the faith being the most fluid and adaptable point on the timeline, occurring both before and after baptism, and both before and after profession of faith.¹⁴ As one example, the conversion of the apostle Paul occurred after the sudden appearance of Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Without warning or warm-up, Paul was confronted directly by the Lord himself, challenged in his motives, invited into relationship with the Savior, and commissioned for his ministry to the Gentiles. It was only after this dramatic intervention and his immediate baptism by Ananias (Acts 9:18) that Paul received instruction. (This was the nature of “several days” of activity with the disciples in Damascus, in Acts 9:19). In the course of that acquaintance, the Damascus faith community embraced Paul, giving deeper meaning to his baptism.

¹⁴ James A. Wilde, ed., *Before and After Baptism: The Work of Teachers and Catechists* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), 6-8.

In contrast, instruction, ever so brief, preceded the baptisms of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:30-38), Lydia the Philippian businesswoman (Acts 16:13-15), and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:29-33). Whatever was taught—content the Bible reader can sometimes only imagine—was necessary for the decision of the uninitiated. If they believed what they heard, they advanced along the discipling process. Whether before or after baptism, or before or after a profession of faith, instruction of some kind always occurred. Teaching for information (providing a knowledge base) and teaching for transformation (inviting the movement toward Christlikeness) was essential to the first-century process of disciple-making.

Paul, whose teaching gift was immediately apparent even in Damascus (Acts 9:20f), specialized in reaching Gentiles who did not share the Jewish cultural and religious worldview. It is true that virtually wherever he went, he made a habit of engaging Jews in their local synagogues first as a courtesy. Soon after, however, Paul would find a more public place in which to engage the Gentiles in conversation about Jesus Christ. One approach would be relational in style and tone as Paul engaged in lengthy, informative conversation; another would be purely didactic and conceptual. These two dynamics can be observed in one sequence of meetings during Paul's second missionary journey in Acts 17. In Thessalonica (verses 1-9), Paul was able to make some headway in the somewhat friendly in-house environment of the synagogue. Relying on his own Jewish sensibilities, he was able to build a theological bridge between traditional Jewish teaching about the Messiah and the gospel of Jesus the Christ. After three weeks of nesting with the Jews, some were persuaded by his reasoning and believed.

In contrast, Athens provided an entirely different challenge to the apostle (verses 16-34). The pagan city was “full of idols” (17:16), observed on Paul’s walk through town and visible from the Areopagus. The Temple of Athena Nike, the Temple of Hephaistos, and the Parthenon loomed in Paul’s peripheral vision as he focused on one particular monument “to an unknown god” (17:23). The city was host to a significant number of Stoics, Epicurean philosophers, and academics whose hobby was to discuss the latest idea or newest speculation in town (17:21). Paul engaged them in debate, and some of them were curious (or perhaps alarmed) enough to bring him to the Areopagus for further discussion. The striking difference between Paul’s message in Thessalonica and the content here in Athens is in the starting place of each argument. Among Jewish peers, Paul’s argument focused on the identity and mission of the Messiah, built upon the story of Israel. Here in Athens, Paul begins with a bridge-building concept, “I see how extremely religious you are” (17:22). “In fact,” (we might imagine Paul saying,) “you have even erected a monument to a god you do not know yet. I can tell you about him, because he has given us his name.” Upon this thin plot of common ground, Paul begins to build a case for God who has made himself known through creation and by whom all will ultimately be judged (17:24-31). The focus of Paul’s message is not so much on the person and work of Jesus Christ—yet—but on God-above-all-gods existing above and in contrast to idols. He could agree that there is a spiritual reality and that spiritual power emanates from gods, but in contrast, there is only one God who made the world and everything in it (including those gods that inhabit the shrines). Paul proceeded to describe this God in more detail, using vocabulary and emphasis that drew in his hearers. Quoting

the Cretan poet Epimenides and the Cilician philosopher Aratus¹⁵ (without the reference to Zeus),¹⁶ Paul refers to familiar concepts and attaches new meaning to them. The purpose of these quotations was to tailor his argument to his hearer who, he asserts, finds existence in God and is God's offspring. Then with that assertion, he invites his hearers to the logical response: repentance and reorientation around the one who has proved his authority by rising from the dead. Through the back door of Greek philosophy, Paul provides intellectual passage to the Christian gospel centered on the resurrected Christ.

Paul's skills and methods demonstrated in both Thessalonica and Athens offer insights that will be applied to twenty-first century missional teaching dynamics in Part Three. For now, these examples demonstrate that the disciple-making process usually includes teaching the basics of Christian faith—to be defined more closely in Part Two—among those who are not yet believers. Proper teaching does not guarantee spiritual conversion, but a foundational knowledge of basic doctrine about God, Jesus Christ, the Spirit, and salvation becomes the signpost to the means of one's redemption.

Teaching Addressed Priorities of the First-century Church

First-century accounts of disciple-making exhibited three priority goals: accurate information (doctrine), personal transformation (manner of life), and invitation to relationship with God and his people (new social identity). Paul in particular showed an ongoing concern for sound doctrine. First was the differentiation between Jewish tradition and Christian teaching, which is the topic of his letter to the Galatians. Paul also

¹⁵ Marshall, *Acts*, 288–89.

¹⁶ William J. Larkin Jr., *Acts*, vol. 5 of *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 258.

faced the paganism of Greek and Roman culture, as illustrated previously by his encounter with the Athenians. The issues former Jews brought to the discussion were quite different from the concerns brought by converted Greeks. Paul gives careful attention to these doctrinal details, and instructs his protégés to remain faithful to the Word of God despite opposition (2 Tm 3:14-17; 4:1-5) and to hold fast to an accurate rendition of the gospel (e.g. in Galatia, Gal 1:6-9, and Ephesus, 1 Tm 1:3-7).

In Peter's first sermon (Acts 2:14-39) delivered to Jewish pilgrims and God-fearers (Gentiles with an Old Testament theological understanding), the apostle identified Jesus as Lord and Christ and invited his hearers to repent and be baptized. An immediate lifestyle change overcame the thousands who responded: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. . . . All the believers were together and had everything in common" (Acts 2:42-44). Personal transformation produced a new social network for the converts. Later, after Paul's ministry to the Greeks gained momentum, the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) took up the manner-of-life question to decide whether Greek converts to Christ must receive circumcision and obey the law of Moses in order to be welcomed in Christian fellowship. After much discussion and the testimony of missionaries from the field, the Council concluded that observance of the whole Jewish Law was an unnecessary burden (a doctrinal conclusion). However, there were a few (manner-of-life) requirements that were retained: "abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality" (Acts 15:29). From then on, Christian Gentiles and Jews had a joint social identity and would learn over time how to integrate their interests. Paul would later elaborate on this new reality in his letters to the Romans and Ephesians.

Teaching Supported the Early Surge in Disciple-Making

Resulting from this early faithfulness to the gospel, careful attention to sound doctrine, and the generous spiritual hospitality of the early Church, the effectiveness of the apostolic period was nothing short of spectacular. By the end of the first century, Rodney Stark, in *The Rise of Christianity*, estimates that the number of Christians averaged twenty-five thousand.¹⁷ By the time of Constantine, about AD 310, that number had risen to twenty million Christians, and this during a period of intense Roman persecution.¹⁸ Missional teaching—with its focus on right doctrine, practical application in a godly manner of life without the shackles of legalism, and evangelistic invitation to follow the Savior—was a key component to the Church’s upsurge during an otherwise dark period of Christian persecution.

Teaching Formalized in the Church

As Christianity again came into the light of day upon its legalization in AD 313, the method of making disciples was formalized, and highly structured instruction appeared in the continuum leading up to baptism and church membership. Subsequent history demonstrates that catechesis soon got tangled in red tape and became an obstacle course for new believers. Before the Council of Nicea (AD 325) those who had indicated an interest in Christian instruction were enrolled in a “pre-catechumenate.” During this period of orientation, the individual was given the opportunity to forsake worship of idols

¹⁷ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), cited in Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

and demonstrate a desire to live a virtuous life.¹⁹ Sometimes the inquirer followed a strict discipline of prayer and fasting as a way of aligning with God's holiness. The weekly reading of the lectionary passages during worship exposed inquirers to the Scriptures.

Later, in the fourth and fifth centuries, the catechumenate was programmed in four distinct stages: 1) the longest stage—up to three years—was intended for those who expressed an interest in the Christian way of life, as an reorientation and testing period; 2) prospective candidates for baptism were identified; 3) petitioners were approved for baptism after undergoing six steps, including exorcism, meetings with the bishop, instruction on the Lord's Prayer and the creed, penitential practice, confession of one's sins, and a pre-baptismal bath (this last sequence took place during Lent, culminating with baptism on Easter); and 4) the baptized then received post-baptismal catechesis, which took place Easter week to explain from firsthand experience the meaning of baptism and the body of Christ.²⁰ Catholic theologian James Wilde notes that during the catechumenate a prospective church member was expected to forsake idols and get one's spiritual life on track through the disciplines, before baptism could be conferred.²¹ While a three-year proving period may be excessive and perhaps even "works righteousness," nonetheless, such a transition time took seriously the commandments of Jesus and the new life consistent with his will.

¹⁹ Wilde, *Before and After Baptism*, 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19-23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

Not All Early Teaching Methods Were Traditional

In contrast to the Rome-centered version just described, St. Patrick (ca. AD 397-493) developed what George Hunter calls the “Celtic way of evangelism” in the British Isles. Focusing on the barbarians of northern Britain, Patrick apparently gathered a band of disciples and roamed from one settlement to another, incarnating Christ’s community. In a style perfectly suited to the imaginative and passionate Irish, the Christian missionaries would plant themselves as an alternative community adjacent to a tribal village and invite the locals to watch, enter, and participate in their life of work and worship.²² This missional community modeled the kingdom of God, engaged their observers in conversation, welcomed their participation in a winsome way of life, and invited them to commit themselves to Christ.²³ “Belonging before believing” was their watchword, exactly the opposite of the proper Roman view that required barbarians to clean up their act before they were admitted into the fellowship.²⁴

Patrick’s method is a compelling example of instruction prior to belief and baptism, without administrative red tape. He demonstrated the wisdom of bringing the Word to life and patiently attending to the questions and struggles of faith through day-to-day informative conversation. Specializing in the “middle-level issues of life,” which revolve around the messy mysteries and disappointments of life as it happens, Celtic

²² George G. Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . . Again* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 21, 29-30.

²³ Ian Bradley, *Colonies of Heaven: Celtic Models for Today’s Church* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2000), 5-7.

²⁴ Hunter, *The Celtic Way*, 53.

Christianity was practical and powerful to help people cope with poverty, nature's uncertainties, and evil forces.²⁵ Each of these circumstances offered a teachable moment, and living in close proximity, a barbarian could see how the Christian community responded. Though not formalized as catechesis, this was astoundingly effective in bringing a nation to Jesus Christ and enfolding it into the covenant community of grace. In Patrick's lifetime, his missionary bands baptized perhaps tens of thousands and planted seven hundred churches, ordaining over one thousand priests.²⁶ This movement offers an excellent example of the Great Commission dynamic of "going, making disciples, [by] baptizing and teaching them," completely in keeping with the practice of the first apostles in the book of Acts. It is this example that inspires the discussion of missional teaching in Parts Two and Three to follow.

²⁵ Paul Heibert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no. 1 (January 1982): 35-47, cited in Hunter, *The Celtic Way*, 31. Heibert describes three levels of life experience: the bottom level deals with empirical factors of life (those apprehended by the senses); the top level deals with life and death in the transcendent realm; and the middle-level is life as it happens.

²⁶ Liam de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 129, cited in Hunter, *The Celtic Way*, 23.

CHAPTER 2

MISSIONAL TEACHING AS AN OBLIGATION OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

Two thousand years of history have transpired since the Great Commission, requiring a fresh look at teaching and learning. Biblical examples of teaching in the early Church notwithstanding, the question remains whether making disciples by means of teaching the unchurched is tenable in the twenty-first century. One might think not, simply by virtue of the sweeping philosophical, sociological, and technological shifts that have occurred. However, Jesus did not put a time limit on his charge, which means today's disciples must grapple with the issues it raises and develop a thoughtful response.

Teaching Still Essential

Twenty-first-century Christians who take the Great Commission seriously must reclaim the role and ministry of teaching in the missional setting. Whatever reticence one has toward teaching or learning (a topic to be explored in Chapter 4) must be overcome in order to obey Christ in this one command: to make disciples by means of teaching. If the Church desires to reap a great harvest of new believers and grounded disciples, the discipline of patient teaching must be adopted and practiced without timidity. To lay the groundwork for praxis, the first step is to define the term “teaching” as it is generally

understood and then to develop a confidence that it is both helpful and necessary for the making of Christian disciples.

Definition of “Teaching”

Missional leaders should begin by wiping the mental slate clean of any traditional definition of “teaching,” because those preconceived notions very quickly assume methods and styles which may or may not fit later into the missional model. In general, teaching is an activity or process that facilitates learning. It may take various forms, like a traditional classroom setting using didactic methods or an informative conversation in the park. Learning can happen anywhere; therefore, teaching can happen anywhere. Some educators define learning as “a process that brings together cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences and experiences for acquiring, enhancing, or making changes in one’s knowledge, skills, values, and worldviews.”¹ In other words, the teacher manages the discovery and retention of information and interacts with learners around the subject until they are changed by it.

Figure 2 illustrates that learning occurs when an internal mental action occurs to create lasting change in a person’s thinking, feeling, or behavior. This internal action (represented by the “Learning Process” column) takes the data of one’s experience (“Teaching Input”) and makes it one’s own (“Learning Outcomes”). That is, one adapts one’s experiences of reality using cognitive processes to make sense out of things that happen. Adaptation is a thinking process by which one organizes one’s new experiences either: 1) in accordance with already existing structures (organized units or conceptual

¹ Sharan B. Merriam, Rosemary S. Caffarella, Lisa M. Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 277.

categories sufficient to explain or contain an experience), or 2) new mental structures constructed to handle new experiences (new organized units, or new sub-categories within established units). Learning, therefore, entails one of two processes: 1) adding new data to existing structures forged by previous experience, or 2) developing new structures to accommodate information that does not fit into previous experience.² Using religious conversion as an example of a learning process, a person's experience of spiritual rebirth may be consistent with the teaching and family values of one's upbringing, requiring no new cognitive structures to handle it. Or conversion may be so radically different from an unchurched or rebellious past that an entirely new category is required to describe it. Paul saw conversion as nothing short of complete transformation: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor 5:17). Conversion is one learning outcome that radically alters a person's experience of reality and therefore requires adoption of a new way of thinking about life.

² Cognitive learning theories are complex and numerous, but their roots can be traced to Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and David P. Ausubel (1918-2008). David Kolb (1939-) contributed a theory of experiential learning (1975) that has been critiqued and refined since its publication. A brief summary of developments in cognitive structure theory can be found in Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner,, *Learning in Adulthood*, 284-87, and of experiential learning, 159-86. Kolb's learning circle will be used in Chapter 6 as a framework for missional teaching.

TEACHING INPUT → gathers resources to the learner:	LEARNING PROCESS → to sort, test, and choose alternatives	LEARNING OUTCOMES: acquisition, enhancement, or change of
information emotional influences personal experience environmental influences	processed in an enlightening environment organized by the teacher (guide, facilitator, group leader), using learning activities that produce the desired result in →	knowledge (cognitive) feelings, values (affective) action, skills (behavioral) identity and worldview (becoming)

Figure 2. The Teaching/Learning Process from Input to Outcomes.

The dynamics of the connection between learning and teaching are at once observable and mysterious. Learning often occurs as a result of a guided learning activity, during which a teacher (the guide) perceives the “aha moment.” The proof that a learning goal has been accomplished is the student’s apprehension of the material, demonstrated concretely. Effective teaching has as its outcome some observable acquisition of knowledge, change of heart, development of skills, and/or adoption of an altered worldview. Stated in the negative, teaching has not occurred if learning has not resulted. If no discernable change has occurred in a learner during or after an educational experience, what might have been called “teaching” was actually an activity requiring a different name: lecturing, talking, or broadcasting. Teaching, for the purposes of this paper, is defined by the result. The mystery of this process revolves around every teacher’s nightmare: the method that works for some students does not work for others.

One can also learn from personal experience or self-designed study without a personal teaching agent. Julius Caesar famously observed, “Experience is the best

teacher.”³ Similarly, a book can teach.⁴ When no person takes the role of teaching agent, it is important to note that something else does. The process of learning requires input from some source outside the learner, be it the Bible, another book or media source, a developing circumstance, or the rediscovery of some reality previously known and forgotten. People learn, in general, when some input beyond their current knowledge or experience is introduced (by whatever means), examined, and embraced.

Definition of “Teaching in the Missional Setting”

The terms “teaching in the missional setting” and “missional teaching” refer to the process of teaching the unchurched, de-churched, or religiously allergic toward the goal of making new disciples. For a setting itself to be considered missional, it must be differentiated from the church’s home turf. The missional setting is any place outside the physical realm of the church—off-campus, beyond the defining boundaries of a congregation, and among those who ordinarily avoid the institutional church. A missional community (comprising people instead of buildings) forms the nucleus for a gathering in neighborhoods, workplaces, or “third places.”⁵ Its ministry style is incarnational, in the spirit of Jesus, who as God came to earth in the flesh to identify fully with human beings. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch put it this way: “By incarnational we mean [the church] does not create sanctified spaces into which unbelievers must come to encounter

³ C. Julius Caesar, *Commentarii de Bello Civili* (Commentaries on the Civil War), 2.8, from *The Commentaries of Caesar*, ed. William Duncan (St. Louis: Edwards and Bushnell, 1856).

⁴ Charles W. Eliot, *The Happy Life—1896* (New York: Cornell University Library, 2009), 22.

⁵ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1991), 20. “First place” is home and “second place” is work.

the gospel. Rather, the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don't yet know him."⁶ Teaching in the missional setting is done by believers "disassembled" from the church and embedded in the places where the unchurched, de-churched, and religiously allergic congregate.⁷ In this setting, representatives of Jesus build relationships with neighbors or an affinity group (only two examples of the infinite possibilities for venues) and simply live a Christlike life in their midst and offer explanation whenever teachable moments present themselves. By means of informative conversation, the missional teacher responds to the heart-cries and addresses the questions of people who have no other representative of a Christian worldview to consult. Much like St. Patrick's teams fanning out across Ireland to dwell near tribal villages and demonstrate an alternative (Christian) community, missional teachers today disperse to their local Starbucks, gym, or city park, ready to come alongside anyone with an honest question about life or faith. The relative informality of missional teaching does not preclude it becoming more organized over time, if a group of curious inquirers emerges; but informal encounters are the start.

In the missional setting, most importantly, appropriate learning outcomes are defined with the starting points of specific participants in mind. A "needs assessment" is conducted by means of compassionate listening, patient attending, godly wisdom, and ongoing relational commitment. Such self-giving effort takes time and prolonged presence, as well as a strong faith and the fruit of the Spirit. When the time is right, and the questions are articulated, a missional teacher becomes the bridge between an inquirer

⁶ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 12.

⁷ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 63.

and the Living Savior. The teacher can do this by many means, some described in Part Three, but the effort involves intersecting an individual's story with God's Story.

Renewal of the Mind and the Changed Life

As Willard points out, humanity's fall from grace began with thoughts that turned away from God.⁸ Those thoughts and the mind that carries them must be changed in order for one's life to follow suit. The Apostle Paul linked this mental transformation to holiness: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God" (Rm 12:2). Right thinking is a prerequisite to right action. It is a teacher's role to establish with learners what is right thinking and then apply it so that it yields right action. If one has inaccurate thoughts about God, for instance, one's actions will be affected as exemplified by Eve in Genesis 3. She was convinced that God really did not mean what he had said when he forbade eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The thought that God was withholding something to deny her wisdom moved her to take matters into her own hands, and she ate off the tree (Gn 3:1–6). In contrast, right thinking when confronted with the serpent's temptation would have been to rehearse in thought (and perhaps even in conversation with God) what God had really said. Wrong thinking, however, led her to believe that God could not be trusted, and that she needed a second opinion, which the serpent and her husband Adam were all too willing to provide.

Having fallen with Eve into doubt and distrust of God, the entire human race struggles to reclaim a right view of God, God's intention and purpose, and God's will for

⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2002), 95.

behavior. The “renewing of your minds” of Romans 12:2 entails a rebooting of one’s thinking system, a change of mind, and a resetting of ideas. This is a painstaking journey, often resisted by people’s deepest prejudices or complaints about God. Calling it a journey invites teachers to come alongside as trail guides, alert to teachable moments, willing to engage in informative conversation, and able to clear up misconceptions that emerge. Willard describes Christian spiritual formation in terms of a trade of idea systems:

Christian spiritual formation is inescapably a matter of recognizing *in ourselves* the idea system of evil that governs the present age and the respective culture that constitute life *away from* God. The needed transformation is very largely a matter of replacing in ourselves those idea systems of evil (and their corresponding cultures) with the idea system that Jesus Christ embodied and taught, and with a culture of the kingdom of God.⁹

This trade-off is a necessary transaction within the unbeliever or religiously allergic person. Missional communities and missional teachers are in the best position to guide this process among those who are evaluating the idea structure that governs their world. The goal of this exchange is to see God in the proper light, to find out what he really said, and to develop concrete ways to respond to the amazing love, consistent justice, and pure righteousness of one’s Creator. This personal development has a dramatic effect on the language one uses to describe reality, the social network one chooses for support, and the governing paradigm within which a person operates. Choosing not to conform to the world any longer represents a major paradigm shift. The transformation of one’s mind basically changes everything.

⁹ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 98.

Teaching has the potential to shape disciples who can love God with their hearts, souls, minds, and strength in obedience to the Great Commandment (Mk 12:30). This “greatest of all the commandments” is the scriptural way of identifying the domains of learning, stated in figure 2 as knowing (cognitive), feeling (affective), doing (behavioral), and becoming. Teaching at its creative best is absolutely necessary for engaging the mind to pursue God. The overarching goal of Christian teaching is a budding disciple who embraces a relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, that is volitional, all-encompassing, self-defining, thoughtful, and concretely expressed in behavior. The desired behavior is Christlikeness, which is practiced in steps with progress toward perfection. It is not necessary at this time to engage in a dialogue about what level of sanctification can or should be achieved as a result of discipling. Perfection is in every Christian’s future: if not in this life, certainly in the next. One’s present efforts toward discipleship are intended to point in that direction. Robert Mulholland offers a helpful definition of Christian formation (the teaching/learning process), which states the goal clearly: “Christian formation is the process of being conformed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.”¹⁰ This process of Christian formation, or of “becoming” in Christ, comprises learning in all the different domains of life and is holistic by nature. In the missional setting, a robust form of holistic discipleship invites willing participants to experiment with new input from across life’s spectrum: ways of thinking, unfamiliar information from Scripture, management of emotions, new priorities, disciplined sexuality, right relationship, healthful practices, and service to others. Each of these

¹⁰ M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000), 25.

experiments contributes to an overall learning process, the fruit of which (one hopes) is new life in Christ, in the fellowship of other believers, within the culture and society in which they were found.

Theological Reflection on Faith as a Prerequisite to Learning

A theological question arises as one assembles a case for teaching people about the faith before the Holy Spirit is present in them to interpret and apply what they learn. The question can only be lightly treated here, knowing theologians have pondered it since Augustine. In the contemporary setting, however, the question is urgent, and the Christian teacher must have a grip on the most important aspects of this discussion.

The first point is simply to acknowledge that there is a difference between acquiring knowledge about Jesus Christ and coming to faith in Jesus Christ. There is a crossover, even perhaps a progression between knowledge and faith, but according to Rudolph Bultmann, the two depend on each other because spiritual knowledge (γινώσκω) is gained both cognitively and experientially.¹¹ Humbly, it must be emphasized that orthodox teaching does not guarantee conversion. However, good teaching underscores the reality that faith is not baseless, as Calvin emphasized: “Faith rests not on ignorance, but on knowledge.”¹² In fact, faith is reasonable, and for many who are at least curious about what Christians believe, some body of knowledge is

¹¹ Rudolph Bultmann, “γινώσκω,” in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 690.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:545, hereafter cited as *ICR*, III, 2,2: 545.

helpful for making a decision about believing. Willard offers a helpful discussion of this “faith seeking understanding” dynamic:

Knowledge strengthens faith, sometimes by allowing us to grasp an item of faith in such a way that it also becomes an item of knowledge. Knowledge also can and often has laid a foundation for faith. We do often believe things because we have come to know them, and that is an ideal condition of belief. On the other hand, faith commonly acts as a framework and guide for the development and use of knowledge. Neither is complete without the other.¹³

Coming to faith in Jesus Christ involves the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, that is, according to John 3:3-8, an action of the Holy Spirit causing a person to be reborn spiritually. That action is most certainly beyond the control of the teacher, but faith is not belief unless it has an object. What (or who) that object is usually needs some explanation. Paul made this necessity clear: “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (Rm 10:14). For this reason, knowledge of the holy is true knowledge and a signpost to the reality that can be experienced. Scripture’s witness is the sufficient record of this knowledge, sufficient in its content to make Christ known well enough for a person to make a decision about believing in him. That decision is empowered by the Holy Spirit in the act of regeneration.

Addressing the key issue from a theological perspective, one must ask if it is possible for a Christian believer to teach a non-believer “to obey everything [Christ] has told you.” The next question becomes whether a Christian teacher can—by giving information and explaining biblical content, for instance—help a non-believer move

¹³ Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2009), 34.

toward a decision to follow Christ and adopt God’s worldview. A “yes” to this question would encourage Christians to use their spiritual gifts of teaching, knowledge, wisdom, and evangelism in informative conversation with non-believers, understanding that faith comprises knowledge, assent, and trust.¹⁴ A “no” would keep those same Christians humble about human power that might lead a person toward Christ, and patient with the work of the Holy Spirit in a not-yet believer’s life.

Theologians have been arguing the question for millennia. “Yes” is based on the classic theological arguments in favor of *analogia entis*, “analogy of being.” In Medieval times, as described by Bonaventure in *The Soul’s Journey into God*, the idea was that because human beings, even in their fallen state, were created in the image of God, and in some way given “eternity in their hearts” (אֶת־הָעֶלְמִים נָתַן בְּלִבָּם נִבְלִי) as in Ecclesiastes 3:11, there was the possibility of enough in common (analogy) between God and humanity for them to be able to comprehend God to a degree.¹⁵ This degree is limited, of course, but the affirmation is that God can be known about and understood based on human experience with what God has created. Scriptural support for this idea is found in Romans 1, where Paul states,

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen (νοούμενα καθοράται) through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God (γνόντες τὸν θεὸν), they did not honor him as God. (Rm 1:19-21a)

¹⁴ Calvin, *ICR*, III, 2, 33:581. Faith = Knowledge + Assent + Trust was a formulation popularized in the adult Bible overview curriculum, “New Testament Lesson 12,” *Bethel Bible Series*, rev. ed. (Madison, WI: The Adult Christian Education Foundation, 1981), 82-86.

¹⁵ Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 75-76.

Karl Barth rejects *analogia entis* based on the damage of total depravity and perhaps out of understandable fear that Christians believing in it would be less dependent upon the necessary mediation of Christ for knowing God.¹⁶ Barth prefers to rest on *analogia fidei*, the “analogy of faith.” This view sees faith in Jesus Christ as the prerequisite for a person to connect with God even at the cognitive level. His scriptural basis for this view includes John 14:6: “I am . . . the Truth No one comes to the Father except through me.” The exegetical practice consistent with the analogy of faith is this: one enters into the faith and worldview of Scripture, believing that the Word of God written is the sufficient and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ, who is “present” in both the Old and New Testaments, which are unified in their presentation of the Savior. The Scripture’s truth is discoverable only if the reader enters in with faith to seek the knowledge of God. Holding this view, a Sunday school teacher would introduce a class for seekers by saying, “We’re here to explore the elements of Christian faith, but we start with an understanding and an assumption that the Scriptures are the true and authoritative Word of God, and we won’t be arguing that point.” Among twenty-first-century skeptics this is a big pill to swallow, but it illustrates the application of Barth’s view and highlights the difficulty of the present task of Christian teaching.

The practical implication of Barth’s view is that the Church and its agents in the world can only exist as witnesses of faith against unbelief, but cannot have any true agency in the conversion of a non-believer.¹⁷ This puts the role of teacher (and even evangelist) in question, if all one can do is exist as a witness of faith contrary to unbelief.

¹⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I, part 1, trans. G. T. Tomson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 227-47, hereafter cited as *CD*, I, 1:227-47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

If Christians live in a closed world, then, as Barth postulates, no one else can enter into it: “Evangelical dogmatics knows that there can be no entering the self-enclosed circle of this concern from without, whether from a general human possibility or an ecclesiastical reality.”¹⁸

Nevertheless, even Barth is willing to grant that the ungodly can hold an *opinio historica*, a “neutral recollective knowledge and affirmation of biblical statements such as is possible apart from the reality of faith.”¹⁹ The Reformers never considered separating from faith the element of *notitia* or *assensus*, i.e., the element of knowledge.²⁰ To do so, according to Barth, would be to reduce faith to an unfounded trust, or to view faith as indiscriminate trust in any kind of object, or to throw doubt on the object of faith (God) and transfer the reality of faith to the believing subject (the self)—a human-centered Cartesian approach in which something is true only because one perceives and believes it, not because it is independently true.

Calvin refers to “implicit faith” as an interim step toward full and trusting faith in Jesus Christ. Implicit faith includes believing what one’s teachers instruct, that is, trusting one’s teachers without necessarily trusting Christ; knowledge without full comprehension; and “wonderment” (at miracles, for instance) that is preparation for faith.²¹ Calvin, a strong proponent and practitioner of Christian teaching himself, lived the “yes” and the “no” of the question daily, believing that “God illumines the

¹⁸ Barth, *CD*, I, 1: 29-30, 42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 234.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 235.

²¹ Calvin, *JCR*, III, 2, 2-3:544-47.

reprobates' minds enough for them to recognize his grace"²² but cautions that "without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Word can do nothing."²³

So the theological question is answered with a caveat: it is possible for pagans to acquire knowledge that is helpful—even necessary—for turning toward the Savior and embracing the gospel of Jesus Christ, but how much the unchurched, de-churched, or religiously allergic can know before further understanding requires faith is still a mysterious matter. If Jesus commissioned his followers to "make disciples . . . baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have told you" (Mt 28:19f), it makes sense that teaching is an indispensable pre-conversion engagement with a potential disciple. The Apostle Paul clearly acted as though this were so, and it seems unavoidable that teaching enables learning, which enables understanding both of what a person can know as well as appreciation for what a person cannot know. It follows that one must trust God for the rest, based on God's track record of revelation and history.

The confidence in missional teaching promoted by this framework is not so much a confidence in a skeptic's ability to hear the Word of God, but assurance of the power of the Spirit-filled believer to teach the Word of God effectively. That teaching, by necessity, entails use of the analogy of being, but it respects the analogy of faith and waits upon the Spirit for a person's repentance. Furthermore, the disciple is not backed into a corner by the earlier claim that teaching has not occurred if learning is not evident: "learning" is not equal to "converting," and significant learning takes place throughout the process that draws a non-believer closer to belief in Jesus Christ. In today's

²² Calvin, *ICR*, III, 2, 2:556.

²³ *Ibid.*, 580.

experience, evangelists like Brad Kallenberg have an appreciation for the reality that conversion is a process more than an event.²⁴ Missional teaching is an essential part of that process, in anticipation of the Holy Spirit's regeneration. It is this process that will be described in Part Three.

Further, if the traditional understanding of teaching is broadened to encompass what educator Parker Palmer envisioned—"creating the space in which the community of truth can be practiced,"—then teaching involves an invitation to try truth on, experiment with faith, identify the point at which trust is required, and look it square in the face.²⁵ The analogy of being encourages Christians to find the language, the sermon illustrations, and the experiences that can describe to a degree what God is like and how God has acted. The analogy of faith reminds believers that when a person finally apprehends the truth, this discovery is not merely cognitive but spiritual, the work of the Spirit to regenerate a cold heart and turn it toward God. Further, the *analogia fidei* bolsters the Christian's courage to stand as witness of God's revealed truth and not succumb to the temptation to dumb down the gospel or to "tickle the ears" of this fickle age with a gospel that is more palatable, politically correct, or otherwise non-offensive (2 Tm 4:3).

Coming at the question from the other side, it is possible and advisable for a Christian disciple to cross a line into the pagan world, fully representing and relating the gospel, while retaining appropriate holiness. That holiness need not prevent a full engagement with the people of the world. Even if, as Barth argues, the unbeliever cannot

²⁴ Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 9-14. Kallenberg, a parachurch evangelist, documents the adaptations his methods required over the years to meet the emerging postmodernism of college students. He discovered that as conversion rates dropped, sociological processes lengthened the time between first engagement and submission to Christ. One key factor was the rise in biblical illiteracy.

²⁵ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 92.

enter into the Christian world without faith, it must be possible for the believer to enter the world of the unbeliever in order to make Christ known there. This is the essence of bridge-building, modeled by Christ's Incarnation which is itself the basis of the conviction to "go, make disciples and teach them." Just as the Father sent Jesus to humanity, Jesus sends his disciples into the world (Jn 20:21) not just to be witnesses, but also to teach, to enter into relationships, and to invite people to put their trust in God through Christ. Disciples of Christ find assurance that while they are in the world, they do not draw power from the world but from God. From this position of strength and confidence, disciples are sent to stand as witnesses for the world to the reality of another world, the Kingdom of God. Christian teaching, in this light, is an attempt to enlarge the vision of worldly people to see a reality beyond themselves, beyond the senses, beyond self-centered preoccupations, to the purposes of God in creation and most especially in and through humanity.

The Difference between Missional and Evangelistic Teaching

In answer to the chicken-or-the-egg question of whether faith comes before learning or learning enables faith, a "both/and" tension is present. In light of this discussion, a differentiation should be made between missional teaching and evangelistic teaching. The distinctions drawn here reflect word usage for this paper, recognizing that in real life such fine lines may not always be necessary. The two concepts are related, but not the same. Evangelistic teaching has as its primary learning goal the conversion of the student. The teacher will have been successful if the previously unchurched and/or unbelieving person becomes a Christian and begins, for instance, to attend church or

Bible study. Missional teaching may or may not end in the conversion of the student. The missional teacher will have been successful if the unchurched or religiously allergic person engages in honest and informative conversation, through which the inquirer corrects misconceptions about faith, the Triune God, or other points of scriptural knowledge. A biblical example of a missional teaching moment is found in Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler, who ran up to Jesus to ask a factual question:

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (Mk 10:17–22)

The inquirer asked a good question, and Jesus engaged him in informative conversation. By pressing the point, the ruler was showing some openness to the things of God and wanted something more to guide his discipline. Jesus gave him that guidance, expanding upon the Law to include a generous reorientation toward the poor. The answer, however, was not pleasing to the rich man, who had many assets. His response was, “Thanks, but no thanks,” and he departed sadly. That he did not want to act on what Jesus had taught him does not mean Jesus failed as a teacher. In fact, Jesus succeeded in clarifying the situation well enough that the young man knew exactly what his choice was. Jesus managed his side of the conversation kindly, with genuine love, establishing eye contact. The ruler's choosing to decline the invitation was an unfortunate outcome, which, to the evangelistic teacher, would have constituted a failure. From a missional standpoint, however, this was a successful encounter because it was a conversation initiated by the

inquirer's need to know, Jesus listened compassionately and answered the man's question, and the choice was made clear to the man and got him to think.

The key difference between an evangelistic and a missional teaching moment resides in the different expectations and goals of the conversation. The missional teacher is willing to accept a rejection of what he or she has taught and respects the honesty of another who cannot embrace the truth. A relationship may still be pursued, as part of incarnational ministry, with the long view in mind. The teaching that happens in the meantime is missional, without the expectation that the one in sight will ever turn around, but ready to rejoice if that does happen. The evangelistic teacher sees the task as incomplete until the other relents and submits to Christ, but may eventually turn to more fertile soil if the rejection seems final. The differences are subtle and useful only to the extent that their delineation helps fellow disciples appreciate the processes both employ using different spiritual gifts, but ultimately to the same end. A missional approach is potentially very open-ended; an evangelistic approach seeks to bring closure to the quest sooner rather than later.

The scriptural mandate in Chapter 1 and its interpretation in Chapter 2 have made the case that missional teaching was a mainstay in the early centuries of the Church and was an essential element in the Church's obligation of making disciples in fulfillment of the Great Commission. It has been shown that there is always a role for teaching to play, both before and after a disciple declares faith and/or is baptized, and that teaching/learning is particularly valid and necessary to the process of becoming a disciple. The Great Commission challenges today's Church to reclaim the ministry of teaching in the current missional setting, and thereby to continue to obey Jesus Christ's final command.

As will be discovered in Part Two, a few remarkable similarities exist between the first-century Near East and today's American West Coast, validating a sense of call to missional teaching now. Pagan influences both overt and subtle permeate California culture, for instance. The more obvious occult practices, devil worship and witchcraft, and the more subtle appeals to secularization give some indication that a Christian worldview is eroding. In both the first and twenty-first centuries, the presence of a believing community is strong, but it constitutes a small minority of the population, and vigorous resistance to the Church and its role in society exists. On the other hand, some very significant differences exist after the developments of two thousand years, suggesting that the Great Commission must now be undertaken with new cultural assumptions in mind and using contemporary teaching methods to accomplish it. Part Two will construct the historical bridge to the present, in order to apply the lessons learned in Part One to both theory and practice within the Church and missional setting

PART TWO

MEANING

CHAPTER 3

MISSIONAL TEACHING MEETS TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY CHALLENGES

The assignment to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything Jesus said, was the Church's top priority in the early years of its existence. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Great Commission was Jesus' last word to his disciples, carrying great weight with them and motivating their proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. Moving through the centuries to the present, there should be no doubt that the timeless and urgent call of the Great Commission is still in force. A need to make disciples still exists, most obviously because the job has not been completed. Therefore, the present generation of church leaders, evangelists, and teachers must grapple with the mandate and experiment with means for carrying it out.

The task of addressing all the nations with the gospel is at once easier and more difficult in 2011 than it was in AD 50. Both the great challenges and the inviting opportunities of this present time mean that careful discernment must be employed to implement Christ's mandate now. The rate of change in American culture has accelerated in recent decades, enough to require a serious reassessment of how the Church is to fulfill its duty to Christ. To this end, attention must be given to discovering the real spiritual

needs of twenty-first-century Westerners and how they can be addressed through missional teaching, for the purpose of making disciples.

Cultural Challenges to Missional Teaching

Since the 1960s, when church attendance in the United States reached its peak and a significant majority of citizens identified themselves as church-going Christians, the cultural landscape has undergone nothing short of a sociological earthquake. In the last fifty years, structures, ideologies, and institutions that most people previously relied upon for a sense of definition, stability, or leadership proved to be vulnerable. During the 1960s alone, the United States dealt with national tragedies including the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The first lunar landing was a source of great national pride in 1969, but only after the nation endured the death of three astronauts in 1967. The publisher of *Time* introduced the magazine's retrospective on the decade of the 1960s with this summary: "There can be little argument that the 1960s was a time of turmoil, of bitter protest and brutal violence, of confusion and finally, of near despair over the American destiny."¹

The 1970s brought President Nixon's Watergate scandal into the glaring television lights of national scrutiny, and the ignominious end to the Vietnam War relieved disillusioned protesters and rankled confused veterans. The Jesus Movement captured the enthusiasm of college students in an anti-organized religion revival, and charismatic renewal swept across the country defying denominational boundaries. Sexual abuse allegations within the Catholic Church began attracting attention in the 1980s,

¹ "A Letter from the Publisher," *Time*, December 19, 1969, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,941714,00.html#ixzz1FeyT7XPP> (accessed March 4, 2011).

about the same time that televangelists were getting caught in the snares of their excesses. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 ushered in the collapse of the Soviet Union and thawed the Cold War. Communism and apartheid were discredited in the 1990s, and the World Trade Center attack, Oklahoma City bombing, and Columbine High School shoot-out first brought home the reality of terrorizing violence on the home front.

The 2000s decade was dubbed by *Time* as “the decade from hell.”² After terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the United States went to war in Afghanistan to fight terrorism and invaded Iraq to topple a dictator. Natural disasters of unprecedented proportion, Hurricane Katrina, the Indonesian tsunami, and the Haitian earthquake, rocked the world. Andy Serwer reflected in *Time* on the 2000s: “Bookended by 9/11 at the start and a financial wipeout at the end, the first ten years of [the twenty-first] century will very likely go down as the most dispiriting and disillusioning decade Americans have lived through in the post-World War II era.”³

Accompanying the various liberations, revolutions, and redefinitions of the last fifty years, popular culture exhibited attitudes of resistance toward organized religion and acceptance of ideas and practices contrary to Christian norms. Resistance was demonstrated, for instance, in the “God is dead” movement in the 1960s,⁴ the rise in evangelical churches,⁵ and the precipitous decline in mainline (e.g. Presbyterian) church

² Andy Serwer, “The 00’s: Goodbye (at Last) to the Decade from Hell” *Time*, November 24, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1942834,00.html> (accessed April 22, 2011).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ken Cedeno, “Is God Dead?” *Time*, April 8, 1966, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,835309,00.html> (accessed March 5, 2011).

⁵ David T. Olson, *American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 102,112.

attendance since 1965.⁶ Openness to non-Christian ideas and practices is illustrated by the popularity of Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code* in the mid-2000s and the number of movies and television programs featuring witchcraft and vampires in the last several years. The withdrawal from church life on one hand and the embracing of unorthodox worldviews on the other took place against a backdrop of inadequate Christian education, biblical illiteracy, and the moral failures of prominent Christian leaders such as Ted Haggard. As church attendance fell, fewer people availed themselves of the opportunity to process their world from a theological, biblical perspective. As church leadership was discredited by the sins of a few, the authority clergy might have enjoyed previously in their communities was seriously undermined.

These trends and troubles have left the Church with several cultural challenges for disciple-making. Each of the following cultural norms have contributed to the difficulties Christians face in conveying the grace and truth of the gospel: 1) mistrust of institutional authority, calling into question the credibility of organized religion and anything it might teach; 2) reticence to join real community social circles and service organizations, as opposed to virtual ones, reducing the opportunities for creating relational teaching/learning environments;⁷ 3) a society focused on "therapeutic individualism," displacing traditional authorities such as pastors with popular psychologists, talk show hosts, and bloggers;⁸ 4) sexual practices and lifestyle commitments contrary to biblical teaching, undermining biblical interpretation and authority; 5) secularized public schooling and

⁶ Milton J. Coulter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, *Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream Protestantism* (Lima, OH: FaithWalk Publishing, 2002), 21.

⁷ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 283.

⁸ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 172-75.

workplaces suppressing the expression of faith in everyday settings;⁹ and 6) the immediate availability of information and opinions on most subjects, enabling people to cobble together a personalized and privatized belief system like “moral therapeutic deism.”¹⁰ These trends and conditions create the impression that the present generation is very difficult to reach with the gospel.

Cultural Opportunities for Missional Teaching

Nevertheless, there are signs from the culture that twenty-first-century soil may be fertile and deep enough to germinate seeds of biblical truth. Great thinkers from Augustine (*Confessions*, AD 397) to Victor Frankl (*Man’s Search for Meaning*, 1946) illustrate that a search for life’s purpose and meaning is inherent in personhood, and this search is as relevant today as ever. According to Willard, people conduct this search by looking for answers to four key questions: 1) the reality question, “What is ‘real’?” 2) the well-being question, “Who has the good life?” 3) the character question, “Who is a really good person?” and 4) the development question, “How does one become a genuinely good person?” As Willard observes, the answers to the first three questions inform the last one.¹¹ Present-day culture suggests some interesting opportunities to engage with the questions of reality, well-being, and character.

According to missional leadership specialist Reggie McNeal, the following three cultural characteristics in North America offer points of ministry contact: 1) emergence

⁹ William A. Donohue, “Religious Expression in the Public Schools” (testimony, United States Civil Rights Commission, Washington, D.C., May 20, 1998), <http://www.catholicleague.org/research/publicschools.htm> (accessed April 22, 2011).

¹⁰ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162.

¹¹ Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*, 45-50.

of the altruism economy, 2) search for personal growth, and 3) prevailing hunger for spiritual vitality.¹² These characteristics provide opportunities for Christian disciples to enter into mainstream society as representatives of Kingdom values and invite people to consider God's purposes in their search for answers to life's big questions. If Christian disciples can link one of these cultural conditions to the questions of meaning, then informative conversation and missional teaching may follow. A further explanation of those links will illustrate the possibilities.

Altruistic responses to devastating natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and information technology that broadcasts the humanitarian need into every living room have been remarkable worldwide. It is not only necessary but also “cool” to travel to the sight of a disaster and help out, and American citizens have done so by the thousands. With the click of a mouse, dollars can be allocated to causes from earthquake relief to child sponsorship. *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, in which a deserving family receives a new or renovated house, captivates a large television audience. McNeal also identifies a trend in consumers' attitudes: “[Individuals] also expect the people they deal with in commerce, the schools they attend, the business they support—and the churches they belong to—to be investing in making the world a better place.” As an example, Camano Island Coffee publicizes its commitment statement on every bag of coffee: “Nearly 10 years ago, we set out to create a company that would not only provide the freshest, organic, gourmet coffee, but a company that would also help the farmers and

¹² Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 4-14.

their families that grow our coffee to achieve sustainability. We are thankful to now represent . . . organizations providing hope to 39 villages worldwide.”¹³

As McNeal reasons, “Once the church ventures into the street to engage human need, it will have many partners from all domains of culture to join with it in creating a better world. This explosion of good actually creates a chance for the church to gain relevance and influence.”¹⁴ In other words, the unchurched, de-churched, and religiously allergic of one’s neighborhood might be moved to consider authentic Christianity if they saw firsthand the commitment of church people to the common good. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, in their book, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*, drive the point home: “The perception of [church] outsiders will change only when Christians strive to represent the heart of God in every relationship and situation.”¹⁵

Personal growth continues to motivate people to search for a better life or at least to feel better about the life they have. McNeal cites Rick Warren’s runaway bestseller *The Purpose Driven Life* as evidence that people want to make their lives count. He claims that “the unprecedented pursuit of personal development” can be traced to several key changes, including the availability of information on any topic, whetting the appetite for lifelong learning. The availability of information empowers people to do things for

¹³ Camano Island Coffee Roasters, “Commitment Statement,” <http://www.camanoislandcoffee.com/index.php> (accessed April 22, 2011).

¹⁴ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 5.

¹⁵ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 226.

themselves that in earlier times would have required a specialist.¹⁶ This thirst for self-improvement creates a curious, questioning mind and heart that, if tapped into, offers an opportunity for informative conversation with the tuned-in Christian disciple. Missional teachers look for opportunities to spend time with those who have embarked on a conscious, intentional course of self-improvement because those who have admitted dissatisfaction are more likely to be open to new ideas or ways of thinking.

People today are looking for ways to process the events and trends of the last fifty years, and they may translate this search into a spiritual quest.¹⁷ Recent history has proven that human beings are just as capable of great evil now as they ever have been. In this postmodern era, the high hopes for the forms and structures of society are dashed. McNeal observes, “Current institutions and systems are no longer trusted as adequate to deal with the growing complexities of the planet’s dilemmas. The result is that people have turned again to transcendent belief systems to help them make sense of the world and its challenges.”¹⁸ People are searching for a power beyond their own, but they may not call that higher power “God” or go looking in traditional settings like the local church. Informative conversation with a missional teacher can assist a person in addressing Willard’s first three philosophical questions, without resorting to easy answers or platitudes but ultimately giving witness to Jesus’ approach. Such a conversation may

¹⁶ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 7-9.

¹⁷ For a thought-provoking analysis of the unfolding “Age of the Spirit,” see Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 10-14. Cox sees the current upheaval as a transition from the “Age of Belief,” which he characterized as creed-bound Christianity, to the “Age of the Spirit,” which is characterized by those who identify themselves as “spiritual but not religious.”

¹⁸ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 12.

sharpen the distinctions between alternative views on the meaning and purpose of life, or they may turn to the effectiveness of Jesus to deal with reality.

The San Francisco Bay Area as a Microcosm of the Missional Challenge

To make this discussion more concrete, an effort will now be made to relate the cultural phenomena and the general principles articulated above to a particular ministry setting. This section may seem like a sharp turn in the journey, but the intent is to show that the challenges making missional teaching difficult and the opportunities making it irresistible are valid in real-life local experience. The San Francisco Bay Area as one particular “missional setting” gives ample evidence that will be helpful later as methods of missional teaching are explored in Part Three.

Bay Area Demographics

The San Francisco Bay Area comprises eight counties in the state of California: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Solano. This geographic region surrounds San Francisco Bay and extends to Sacramento (to the northeast) and to the Pacific Coast (to the southwest).¹⁹ The population in 2010 was a little over eight million, with the largest counties being Santa Clara (home to San Jose), Alameda (Oakland), and Sacramento. The City and County of San Francisco is the smallest of the Bay Area tri-cities, at 805,200.²⁰ San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose

¹⁹ Most demographic sources would not include Sacramento among Bay Area counties, but Sacramento is included for this study because Fuller Northern California has enrolled many students from the Interstate-80 corridor. The reason for its inclusion will become more evident in Part Three.

²⁰ Bay Area Census website, “U.S. Census (2000) and 2008 American Community Survey figures,” <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/bayarea.htm> (accessed April 25, 2011); and U.S. Census website, “2010 Census Info,” <http://factfinder2.census.gov/main.html> (accessed April 25, 2011).

have their high-density urban centers, which are surrounded by suburban “bedroom communities.” Because the Bay Area is a desirable place to live, housing prices, especially on the Peninsula (San Francisco and San Mateo Counties), are some of the highest in the country.²¹ A person with means can enjoy a very nice life in a place with ideal climate, beautiful surroundings, rich cultural resources, and diverse distractions and alternatives to Sunday worship on the weekends.

Bay Area Political, Cultural, Business, and Religious Climate

California is considered a “blue state,” that is, Democrats hold a majority.²² In the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama gathered 61.1 percent of the state’s vote, and John McCain, 37.0 percent. Bay Area counties (except Sacramento) averaged 81.5 percent for Obama, over twenty percentage points higher than the state figure.²³ San Francisco has proven to be a socially liberal island even in comparison with the overwhelmingly Democratic counties surrounding it. Known worldwide as a city hospitable to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons, the city has been a focal point for gays coming out in public and political life, as illustrated by the 2008 movie *Milk* that depicts the political rise and assassination of County Supervisor Harvey Milk in

²¹ National Association of REALTORS®, “Median Sales Price of Existing Single-Family Homes for Metropolitan Areas,” <http://www.realtor.org/research/research/metroprice> (accessed January 2, 2010).

²² Mark E. J. Newman, “Maps of the 2008 US presidential election results,” Department of Physics and Center for the Study of Complex Systems, University of Michigan, 2008, <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/2008/> (accessed March 1, 2011).

²³ California Secretary of State Debra Bowen, *Statement of Vote: November 4, 2008, General Election*, December 13, 2008, http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/sov/2008_general/index.htm (accessed December 29, 2009).

the late-1970s. Census-based studies estimate that 15.4 percent of the city's population is homosexual, the highest among the fifty largest cities in the U.S.²⁴

In 2004, Mayor Gavin Newsome was the first U.S. mayor to declare same-sex marriage legal in San Francisco, only to be thwarted one month later by a California Supreme Court ruling halting the issuing of marriage licenses to gay couples.²⁵

Proposition 8, a California constitutional amendment defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman, was passed in November 2008.²⁶ The matter is still being adjudicated in state and federal courts. In the meantime, the faith community—itsself ranging from left to right on the issue—has been caught in the middle of the controversies surrounding marriage, sexuality, and civil rights.²⁷ Sexual liberation is one of the ways the Bay Area has shown its departure from biblical norms of sexual practice or lifestyle commitments.

Rich cultural diversity exists throughout the Bay Area, with Caucasians comprising less than half the population even in San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara Counties. Statewide, almost 47 percent of the population is White Non-Hispanic, and almost 58 percent speak only English, which means that 42 percent of California's

²⁴ Lornet Turnbull, "12.9% in Seattle are gay or bisexual, second only to S.F., study says," *Seattle Times*, November 16, 2006, http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2003432940_gays16m.html (accessed December 29, 2009).

²⁵ Rachel Gordon, "The Battle over Same Sex Marriage: Uncharted Territory," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 15, 2004, http://articles.sfgate.com/2004-02-15/news/17411152_1_lesbian-couples-same-sex-marriage-gay-rights (accessed December 29, 2009).

²⁶ Bowen, *Statement of Vote*, 9.

²⁷ One example is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) remedial case against a minister Janie Spahr, who conducted same-sex weddings when they were legal in California but against church policy. Cf. Leslie Scanlon, "Spahr violated PC(USA) Constitution, Redwoods Judicial Commission rules," *Presbyterian Outlook*, August 28, 2010, <http://www.pres-outlook.com/news-and-analysis/1-news-a-analysis/10361-spahr-violated-pcusa-constitution-redwoods-judicial-commission-rules.html> (accessed April 22, 2011).

population speaks a language other than English; the majority of these speak Spanish.²⁸

Vibrant university campuses, such as Stanford University and University of California at Berkeley, attract thousands of students from around the world: in 2008, Stanford had 3,400 international students enrolled (21 percent of the student body),²⁹ and in 2007 Berkeley had 2,300 (6 percent of the student body),³⁰ according to their international student centers. No matter where they live, Christians in the Bay Area have ample opportunity to overcome racial and cultural divides and make disciples of all nations.

Santa Clara County is home to some of the most influential high-technology and Internet companies in the world. It was also the epicenter of the “dot-com bust” of the early 2000s. According to the December 2, 2009 report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Peninsula counties as a group experienced the second deepest decline in employment of any metropolitan area after Detroit, Michigan. The regional unemployment rate of about 6.5 percent in 2008 has climbed to about 11 percent in late 2009, with Sacramento County highest at 12.6 percent and Marin County at the Bay Area low of 8.1 percent.³¹ Budget cuts at the state level threaten to cut back on public services to the poor, the disabled, and the mentally ill provided by the state’s Department of Health and Human

²⁸ Modern Language Association: Language Map Data Center, “California,” http://www.mla.org/cgi-shl/docstudio/docs.pl?map_data_results (accessed January 3, 2010).

²⁹ Bechtel International Center at Stanford University, “At a Glance: The International Non-immigrant Student Population—Fall 2008,” http://icenter.stanford.edu/about_us/student_stats/students_08.pdf (accessed December 29, 2009).

³⁰ Berkeley International Office, “International Student Enrollment,” The University of California at Berkeley, http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/multiple_use/fall_2007_statistics.pdf (accessed December 29, 2009).

³¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Table 1. Civilian labor force and unemployment by state and metropolitan area,” U.S. Department of Labor, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/metro.t01.htm> (accessed December 29, 2009).

Services.³² Overall, resources are strained as a 2011-2012 state budget is negotiated.³³ In the prolonged economic downturn, communities are struggling to address the needs of the poor, and those affected are increasing in number. Sacramento County's poverty rate³⁴ is 12.6 percent, the highest in the region, followed by San Francisco's 10.9 percent.³⁵ The flip side of the story is that the Bay Area is home to some of the most prestigious neighborhoods with some of the highest priced homes in the United States (Atherton, Hillsborough, San Francisco's Nob Hill, Sausalito, Kensington, and Los Gatos Hills).³⁶ In many cases, the geographic distance between the rich and the poor is less than three miles. For instance, Nob Hill overlooks the Tenderloin District in San Francisco, and Atherton abuts East Menlo Park in the mid-Peninsula.³⁷ This observation is significant on different levels: the poor live in close proximity to visible displays of the

³² California Department of Finance, "Governor's Budget 2010-2011: Human and Health Services," <http://2010-11.archives.ebudget.ca.gov/Enacted/agencies.html> (accessed April 25, 2011), as compared to California Department of Finance, "Governor's Budget 2011-2012: Human and Health Services," <http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/agencies.html> (accessed April 25, 2011).

³³ Tami Luhby, "California budget: Jerry Brown's \$12 billion in painful cuts," *CNNMoney.com*, January 13, 2011, http://money.cnn.com/2011/01/10/news/economy/california_budget_jerry_brown/index.htm (accessed April 25, 2011).

³⁴ Poverty is calculated based on "thresholds" used by the U.S. Census Bureau. For 2008's figures, see U.S. Census website, "Poverty Thresholds for 2008 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children under 18 Years," <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/threshld/thresh08.html> (accessed January 3, 2010).

³⁵ California Office of the Attorney General, "Statistics: Crime 1998-2007," <http://ag.ca.gov/ejsc/statisticsdatatabs/CrimeCo.php> (accessed January 2, 2010).

³⁶ National Association of REALTORS®, "Median Sales Price of Existing Single-Family Homes for Metropolitan Areas," <http://www.realtor.org/research/research/metroprice> (accessed January 2, 2010). See also DQNews.com: Real Estate News and Custom Data, "Bay Area home sales and median price top last year again," December 19, 2009, <http://www.dqnews.com/Articles/2009/News/California/Bay-Area/RRBay091217.aspx> (accessed January 2, 2010).

³⁷ Catherine Mulbrandon, "San Francisco-Oakland Poverty Map," October 14, 2007, <http://visualizingeconomics.com/2007/10/14/san-francisco-oakland-poverty-map/> (accessed April 22, 2011).

good life; the rich are aware of the existence of low-income neighbors and experience fear, distaste, or avoidance; and from a ministry point of view, resources to address poverty issues are close to the need.

Spiritual Need in the Bay Area

These statistics and observations of the region demonstrate from a temporal point of view that the San Francisco Bay Area has its share of deep need. Its combination of tremendous resources, formidable intellectual capacity, and world-class entrepreneurial spirit would suggest that these urban problems could be addressed effectively, and many initiatives have in fact been made. The diversity and scope of the need, however, also creates a tremendous opportunity for well-meaning people—Christians serious about loving God and their neighbors—to embed themselves among the disadvantaged, ignored, or otherwise marginalized in society. Christian history lifts up fine examples of saints serving “the least of these” (Mt 25:40), for example, Father Damien serving Hawaiian lepers on Molokai and Mother Teresa serving the destitute and dying on the streets of Calcutta. The San Francisco equivalent is ministry to the homeless in the Tenderloin and HIV/AIDS patients. However, there is another kind of poverty at work in this mix, not to be underestimated: spiritual poverty that cuts across socio-economic lines and reaches into the hearts of every Bay Area resident. Highlighting this deficit, Mother Teresa established a house for the Sisters of Mercy in San Francisco, identifying the “hunger for love” as a fundamental need even among the materially wealthy.³⁸

³⁸ Ann and Jeanette Petrie, *Mother Teresa*, DVD, narrated by Richard Attenborough (New York: Petrie Productions, 1986).

While churches in the area have formed local mission teams and volunteered their services throughout the region, their quiet ministry to felt needs has not enhanced the overall reputation of the Church, which has seriously eroded in recent years. In my pastorate at First Presbyterian Church of Concord, spanning 1997 to 2007, I observed a steady degradation of the public's attitude toward clergy and a loss of respect for anything that might be construed as authoritative coming from the Church. In the case of weddings, reliance on magazine advice columnists overtook any visible openness to premarital counseling from the pastor. Even in times of sorrow, families would more frequently approach the church as a dispenser of social services demanded on their terms.

Additional evidence of this loss of confidence in the Church is the decline in worship attendance in the last twenty years. According to the research conducted by David P. Olson of The American Church Research Project, in 1990, 13 percent of Bay Area residents attended church regularly, defined as worshipping at least three out of eight Sundays, compared to 11.7 percent in 2006.³⁹ During this time, the population in the Bay Area rose by 13 percent.⁴⁰ So while the population of the region is growing, the percentage of church attendance is shrinking, yielding a decline in both the actual number of worshippers and their percentage in the population. The organized Church is indeed losing influence in the San Francisco Bay Area. Close to 90 percent of Bay Area residents have chosen not to make church-based worship a priority.

³⁹ David T. Olson, *The American Church*, 92-114. Updates of Olson's research can be found at www.theamericanchurch.org, though a full report is available only for purchase.

⁴⁰ Bay Area Census website, "U.S. Census (2000) and 2006 American Community Survey figures," <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/bayarea.htm> (accessed April 30, 2011).

The statistics are borne out anecdotally. Through countless personal conversations with the unchurched on both sides of the Bay and fellowship with local pastors' groups such as The Valley Pastors, it has become clear that most people in the Bay Area are indifferent to the basic facts about Christianity, inattentive to even the broadest sweep of church history, and unaware of churches and their purpose. This "whateverism" reflects distractions and information overload to some degree, but it also suggests the view that church is irrelevant to everyday life.⁴¹

The thesis of this study is that missional teaching is the missing link between needy people and the life-shaping gospel. By connecting the dots between a helpful incarnational presence and relevant information about God who is at work in everyday life, disciples of Jesus carry out the Great Commission of teaching in the missional setting. They create places of belonging within the culture of those who are church outsiders and intentionally demonstrate the gospel through example and explanation. When disciples of Jesus embed themselves in their community—among the poor as well as the wealthy—their commission is to teach by example and informative conversation, as the need and opportunity arise. Great need and tremendous opportunity present themselves fully in the Bay Area, and one way to function in this missional environment is through missional teaching.

From a Christian point of view, one must assume—whether it is visibly evident or not—that Mother Teresa is right and there is a poverty of spirit and a hunger for intimacy with God among people who are otherwise well off. This observation suggests opportunities for teaching Kingdom values within ministry settings, teaching ethics by

⁴¹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 118-71.

example, and teaching biblical content through ministries of presence wherever human need shows itself. It can be as simple as installing a prayer booth at a pagan faire in Sonoma County, opening doors to personal ministry not possible through a church facility or a formal congregation.⁴²

Adult Ministries in Three Bay Area Churches

One might ask if missional teaching has been tried before in the Bay Area and whether missional results followed. Drawing upon my experience leading adult discipleship ministries in three mainline churches in the Bay Area since 1976, the conclusion is unmistakable that the typical “adult Christian education” programs I designed and implemented were adequate only at one level. They facilitated spiritually based relationships among church members and presented courses on biblical topics and spiritual disciplines. As for missional impact, there is no evidence that former students themselves became teachers of the unchurched in third places.

Menlo Park Presbyterian Church

As a staff member from 1980 to 1986, most of that time in the adult discipleship and equipping department, I coordinated the offering of up to thirty-five classes each quarter at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church (hereafter, MPPC). The topics ranged from books of the Bible to theological themes to recovery or skills development. There was a heavy emphasis on applying psychological principles to relationships from a biblical perspective. Quite often a book authored by a prominent Christian pastor would form the

⁴² Tim Stafford, “Journey to the Center: Joanna Quintrell brings the Christ alternative to alternative spirituality seekers,” *Christianity Today* (December 2010): 40.

basis for a curriculum. Teaching routinely relied on lecturing or open-ended class discussion, and at that time the use of multimedia sources was rare. The overwhelming majority of participants were members of the church, and classes were held on the campus. In a separate category at the time, biweekly small groups met in homes, involving at their peak about one-third of church members. Since the goal of these groups was to foster *koinonia* (that is, tight-knit Christian community), they became closed to newcomers after three weeks of meeting. Attempts were made to develop a certificate program aimed at equipping disciples for Christian service, but the commitment required for apprenticing proved too much for most members. During the period since the late 1980s, the church has grown in size from 3600 to a peak of 5000, currently down to 4000.⁴³ The number of people involved in small groups and classes has declined. Nine classes for adults are currently being offered, some with very large attendance, and seven Bible studies also meet regularly. Since participating in the Willow Creek REVEAL study in 2008, the church has focused its program on a “NextSteps Discipleship Path.” At the present time, this program, which promotes individualized discipling plans, is still in development.⁴⁴

Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church

By the mid 1980s, Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church (hereafter, MVPC) had experienced a growth spurt, and membership grew from 750 to 1150. Membership

⁴³ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly Mission Council, “Ten Year Trends: Menlo Park Presbyterian Church,” <http://apps.pcusa.org/tenyeartrends/report/771/> (accessed on March 5, 2011).

⁴⁴ Reverend Joan Tankersley, interview by author, Menlo Park, CA, February 22, 2010.

peaked at over 1200 in 2003.⁴⁵ To solidify the gains, the congregation called me as its first associate pastor for adult ministries in 1987, charged with enlarging and diversifying the adult fellowship and educational program. “Age and stage” groups, unconsciously following the Baptist Sunday school model, were developed and remained durable for over fifteen years. The Bethel Bible Series, a two-year overview of the entire Bible, was introduced in 1988, and ultimately involved a quarter of all church members in biblical literacy studies. Small groups and affinity gatherings contributed to the church’s mission statement: “We seek to grow in our love for God, for one another, for the Word, and for the world.” Most content-focused classes were folded into the age-and-stage groups, with a few exceptions over the years. Weekly men’s and women’s Bible studies grew to one hundred participants each. Since my departure in 1997, responsive to the busy lives and crammed schedules of members, the church has relied on the traditional mainstays while offering short-term classes, daylong seminars, and small groups of various commitment levels. Currently, the church of about 975 members offers three classes on Sunday mornings and five midweek Bible studies, and the number of small groups is unknown because they organize and meet informally.⁴⁶

Saint Matthew Lutheran Church

Saint Matthew Lutheran Church (hereafter, SMLC) in Walnut Creek is a 1,600-member Evangelical Lutheran Church of America congregation that in the last fourteen

⁴⁵ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly Mission Council, “Ten Year Trends: Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church,” <http://apps.pcusa.org/tenyeartrends/report/4538/> (accessed April 22, 2011).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

years has experienced a surge in membership and involvement.⁴⁷ Less focused on church-initiated “programs” and more focused on equipping and enfranchising members to initiate ministry and small groups, the results are more difficult to measure. Unlike any other Lutheran church in the region, however, SMLC is growing in membership and witnessing adult baptisms on a regular basis. Since my arrival as a mission partner in 2006, the church has adopted an annual rhythm of discipleship opportunities, anchored by an all-church study from January through Lent each year in which the preaching, reading material, and small group curriculum all work in tandem. The result of this is a unified topic of conversation throughout the church, outwardly focused and inviting to members and non-members alike. Currently in one of those all-church study seasons, the church is offering thirty-two small discussion groups involving approximately 380 people.

These three churches, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church, and Saint Matthew Lutheran Church, have several aspects in common: large membership, evangelical theological center, long-term pastorates, several pastors on staff, modern campuses, suburban location, overwhelmingly Caucasian racial makeup, REVEAL Study participation, and uneasy identification with its mainline denomination. The observations made above span different timeframes, corresponding to firsthand experience. In the 1980s, a traditional Sunday school organization was *de rigueur*, and MPPC was considered one of the finest programs of its kind in the nation. In 2011, SMLC demonstrates a significant departure from that earlier tradition, but its adult education history is similar to the other churches. The current situation does not relate to

⁴⁷ Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Congregation Trend Report, “Saint Matthew Lutheran Church, Walnut Creek, California 94598,” <http://archive.elca.org/ScriptLib/RE/Trendnet/cdsTrendNet.asp?Id=CEE7D9CB8A85D5B8DB92DADF9594D5A99BB8DFA1BD92BFE2AFEDBAD8DACFBEA6AAA5C8DFC0BA9C8D> (accessed March 5, 2011).

denominational differences, but rather reflects the passage of time and trends and the experimentation that churches have undertaken as a result of the REVEAL Study.

Churches Evaluated for Missional Impact of Adult Teaching

The two Presbyterian churches illustrate the results of relying on the attractional model for adult education, which generally reaches only existing church members and builds a dependence upon church staff to produce. They flourished in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s with the dynamics of the church-growth movement, first promoted by Donald McGavran at Fuller Seminary in the mid-1960s.⁴⁸ In keeping with this approach, MPPC and MVPC poured considerable effort into attractive programs designed to bring people onto the church campus with hope that attendance would turn into membership. They succeeded spectacularly according to that criterion, but did so primarily by church transfers rather than by new conversions. At MPPC, out of an annual average of 243 new members (between 1992 and 2003 when statistical records are complete), nineteen were baptized into faith (eight percent of new members); MVPC averaged sixty-three new members per year (between 1992 and 2009) with an annual average of seven adult baptisms (11 percent of new members).⁴⁹ See Appendix A for the data on these congregations as well as First Presbyterian Church of Concord.

One would expect, by the current definition of a missional church, that a large church would see a higher ratio of adult baptisms as an indicator of new conversions. A low ratio of new converts among large groups attracted to a large church is counter to the

⁴⁸ Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990).

⁴⁹ Data provided by Ida Smith-Williams, PC(USA) Research Services, based on annual statistical reports submitted by the congregations. See Appendix A for a table of the relevant figures.

emphasis of the missional movement. Missional movement extends outward; it disengages members from the sending congregation and disperses them to ever-widening circles of new influence in the missional setting. See figure 3 for added understanding of the differences in these two approaches.

Element	Traditional Practice	Missional Approach
location	at the church, small groups possibly in members' homes	definitely <i>not</i> at the church, but in homes, "third places"
teaching style	lecture, limited discussion	dialogue, experiential and relational such as apprenticeship or mentoring
target group	people already in the church, or somehow affiliated	those not affiliated with the church, culturally not at home in a church setting
content	published curriculum, Bible texts, Christian books	topics as needed for life, the biblical metanarrative; anything biblical if it relates to the heart-cries of the learner
tools employed	PowerPoint, whiteboard, books	anything and everything: movies, IT, podcasts, games, etc.
outcomes expected	people show up	life reoriented, reconciled, and transformed

Figure 3. Comparison of traditional adult education and missional approaches to teaching.

An indicator of a missional congregation would be a reduction or flattening of church membership figures with evidence of the establishment of daughter churches. To be fair, the literature indicates a shift to missional thinking only in the late 1990s when Darrell Guder's book *Missional Church* was published; but his new focus was apparently a needed corrective since the best practices of thriving churches did not seem to link

reliably to the missional setting. Meanwhile, during the time these churches were at their peak, the ever-growing presence of “third places,” defined as informal gathering spots where people relax in “conviviality and safety,” created opportunities for informal teaching ministry during this period in another dynamic context.⁵⁰ As an example, in central Contra Costa County, whereas no new worship centers (of any religious tradition) have been built in the last five years, at least five large stand-alone gym/spa facilities have been constructed in that time. Also, among many brand coffee spots, Starbucks has at least three hundred stores in the Bay Area.⁵¹

Summary and Transition

Some attitudes apparent in twenty-first-century America may convince the average Christian disciple that teaching is futile and should not be attempted. Upon closer observation described in this chapter, there are indeed portals into the world. It was demonstrated through the microcosm of the San Francisco Bay Area that Christians can find common ground with a needy population—partnership in altruistic efforts, the common desire to be better persons, and the anxieties and loneliness of everyday life.

Even with so many opportunities for interaction with the religiously unaffiliated, there are still obstacles to teaching (even personalized informal instruction) that must be overcome in order for the Church’s people to gain a voice. The resistance to Christian teaching takes the form of allergic reactions to any message deemed too directive, too certain, or too exclusive. If one assumes that teaching entails one person dogmatically

⁵⁰ Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 57.

⁵¹ San Francisco Yellow Pages, “Starbucks Coffee,” <http://www.yellowpages.com/san-francisco-ca/starbucks?g=san+francisco+ca&page=1&q=Starbucks> (accessed April 22, 2011).

lecturing to bored captives in a classroom setting, this obstacle becomes a positive challenge to think creatively for new ways to teach. They do this by fostering a safe environment in which learning can take place and “the community of truth” can be practiced.⁵² This is essentially an intentional, relational, and subject-centered approach to learning, well-suited to the missional context.

For some congregations, incarnational ministry is not considered a legitimate expression of “church” but only a means of outreach that will bring outsiders inside, under the church’s roof. This attitudinal obstacle poses a strategic challenge to missional teaching ministry. Until church members see their calling embedded in Jesus’ great commission—“so send I you”—it will be the Church’s institutional attitude that puts the greatest limit on missional effectiveness in the Bay Area. This attitude is explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

⁵² Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 92.

CHAPTER 4

RESISTANCE TO MISSIONAL TEACHING

Something holds Christian disciples back at the very moment it should be appropriate to enter into informative conversation with an unchurched, de-churched, or religiously allergic person. The barriers to obeying Christ's Great Commission are real; some are rational and some are emotional reasons why people do not engage in the teaching/learning dynamic when the subject is Christian faith. Resistance is observable among all potential participants—potential teachers and learners—and is symptomatic of the primary problems explained in Chapter 3.

First, the proposed recipients of Christian teaching, those who have managed to avoid the church either passively or actively up until the present, are by definition a difficult group to reach. In the Bay Area, as elsewhere, this difficulty is multifaceted due to the intense cosmopolitan culture described previously. Those hard-to-reach people fall into a few categories that require definition; the terms “unchurched,” “de-churched,” and “spiritually allergic” are shaped by the experiences and worldviews that separated them from organized religion.

Secondly, those who might be the prime candidates to be teachers—pastors, seminary students, and church leaders—also raise particular issues that call into question the prospect of teaching unsaved adults. This point was addressed in Chapter 2 in terms of the *analogia entis* (“analogy of being”) and *analogia fidei* (“analogy of faith”) in dialogue with Calvin and Barth. Now the subject will be extended to the assumptions about method and practice that need to be reexamined. It is critically important to do so, in order not to perpetuate or deepen an overall avoidance of a critical mandate of the Great Commission. The hope is to discover areas of misunderstanding that, if addressed, could pave the way for a gracious and effective approach that promotes Christian learning in the missional setting.

Resistance of the Unchurched, De-churched, and Spiritually Allergic

The Scriptures give contemporary Christians some insight into the basic reasons for resistance to the gospel, no less applicable today than they were in the first century. Using the Parable of the Sower (Lk 8:4-15), Jesus described the various reasons why the word of God (the seed) does not bear fruit in a person’s life: 1) the devil steals the seed from a person’s heart before it can take root; 2) a person receives the word in joy, but does not take the steps necessary to foster rooting; and 3) the seed is overwhelmed by the “cares and riches and pleasures of life,” which choke the seed such that it cannot mature.

In the first instance, the devil or his agents (the world and the flesh) create a spiritual dead zone in a person’s heart. This dead zone is an environment toxic to the faith, poisoned by bitterness, anger, selfishness, immorality, or arrogance. The genesis of

such hostility to the goodness of God is unique to each person, but in this condition, the human soul is not hospitable to the word of God.¹

In the second instance, a person experiences an initial joy at hearing the word but does not carry through with spiritual nurture so that the seed can take root. A common way this happens is to experience a weekend retreat or a Christian music concert, which produces a temporary spiritual high. Without follow-up in the form of immediate spiritual reinforcement, perhaps participation in a small group for Bible study and prayer, the initial joy fizzles and disappears, and life goes on as usual. One may have an experience like this several times with repeated disappointments, which convince the individual that the faith has nothing lasting to offer. Thus inoculated, the person is immune to the true message a missional teacher might bring.

In the third instance, a person simply makes no room for the word of God to grow. Immersed in noise, chatter, music, gaming, work, media, wealth, poverty, or even traditional responsibilities, a person does not give any time or space to the nurture of the soul with the word of God. Other distractions monopolize a person's resources and attention, and God's voice is drowned out.

A fourth instance can be added, from Paul's insight, which acknowledges the fundamental scandal of the gospel. Its "foolishness" (1 Cor 1:18–25) centers on the cross, the necessity of which defies Jewish assumptions of how God works and Greek views of wisdom. In the present day, the cross is a foolish anachronism for many, requiring the believer to acknowledge personal sinfulness, to assent to the need for its atonement, and

¹ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 45-60; and Leanne Payne, *The Healing Presence: Curing the Soul Through Union With Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 53, 59-64.

to receive Christ's work on the cross as that which satisfies God and justifies the sinner. Many deem this as too much to ask.

All four of these instances relate to the situation of people being exposed to the word of God in some manner, not necessarily at church. For some reason, however, they do not pursue its incorporation into their way of life. These basic examples indicate that resistance to the gospel is a spiritual reality and common to most people operating "in the flesh" (cf. Rom 8:5-9).

In the missional setting, away from the church campus in community subcultures and "third places," the Christian sower grapples with an additional set of hindrances to fruitful ministry. This is the point at which people's prior experiences with church become factors. The term "unchurched," according to the Barna Research Group, refers to those who are not currently attached to a congregation or who have not attended a church service in the last six months. Persons who have dropped out of church and "avoid churches because of negative past experiences in churches or with church people" are identified as "de-churched."²

"Religiously allergic" is an original term describing the type of response of any person (unreached, unchurched, de-churched) that involves a hyper-alertness, hypersensitivity, and reactive aversion to religious stimuli. An allergic reaction occurs after an initial, probably negative, exposure has produced antigens in the body. Subsequently, when the person is later exposed to the same or similar religious experience, a swift and unconscious reaction is generated, and avoidance of the triggering

² Barna Group, "Millions of Unchurched Adults Are Christians Hurt by Churches but Can Be Healed of the Pain," <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/362-millions-of-unchurched-adults-are-christians-hurt-by-churches-but-can-be-healed-of-the-pain?q=unchurched> (accessed March 7, 2011).

allergen results. To illustrate, I taught a course called “Catholic and Presbyterian: Common Root, Separate Branches,” to a denominationally mixed group. A Catholic priest from the local seminary was invited to speak on papal infallibility, his area of scholarly expertise. One woman took one look at the priest in clerical collar and immediately left the classroom. In an explanatory phone call later she described what sounded like an anxiety attack. One can only imagine the personal experience behind such a reaction, not to be dismissed or diminished; but it was enough to keep the woman from returning, even after reassurances that no more priests would be visiting. She was a religiously allergic person, and she is not alone.

Religion is differentiated from “spirituality” by its identification with a denomination, organization, or institution that defines a set of beliefs, rituals, and practices. Spirituality, an amorphous term of much broader range, refers in this paper to a person’s acknowledgment of and sensitivity to an inner reality that imparts values the person considers good.³ The claim to be “spiritual but not religious” describes a person holding on to a personal faith that gives direction and meaning to life, unsupported by participation in an organized religious establishment. According to research by Robert C. Fuller, this concept is nothing new in American history,⁴ but it had a recent appearance in the Jesus Movement of the 1970s when pastors such as Ray Stedman of Peninsula Bible

³ For a helpful discussion of the range of meanings for “spirituality,” see Cox, *The Future of Faith*, 10-14.

⁴ Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2001).

Church (Palo Alto, California) spurned religion as “churchianity,” and embraced “authentic Christianity” as the biblical alternative.⁵

With these definitions of the target groups in mind, more specific features of their resistance to Christian teaching follow. The potential disciple in today’s American culture presents several possible points of resistance: avoidance of church programs, allergy to truth claims, the primacy of personal experience, learning style preferences, and a consumer mentality applied to the spiritual search. These obstacles will be addressed next.

Avoidance of Church Programs

The fact that unchurched, de-churched, and spiritually allergic people do not attend church limits their exposure to the many possible, positive points of interest that they might find relevant. They have distanced themselves from the traditional delivery of instruction, preaching, and classroom teaching, so in a sense they do not know what they are missing. The damage is done, however, and the attractional model simply does not work for them. The remedy involves a missional approach to go where the unchurched are rather than expect them to come to where the church is.

Allergy to Truth Claims

The aforementioned allergy to religious expression also generalizes to include an allergy to truth claims. This prominent feature of postmodernism is a reaction to modernist certainty, “the Age of the Spirit” supplanting “the Age of Belief,” to use Cox’s

⁵ Ray C. Stedman, *Authentic Christianity* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1975), 19.

terminology.⁶ The concern for orthodoxy and correct doctrine is tiring and unnecessary to the postmodern individual who is more open to spirituality across and beyond traditional religious barriers. Since the pursuit of correct doctrine is replaced in value by openness to the Spirit, as if the two were mutually exclusive, the felt need for information is reduced. It is possible, however, to cultivate sensitivity to the Spirit alongside intentional biblical grounding. This approach becomes a patient, long-term project in a relational, missional setting. To the extent that Christians can model and explain the Christian life “shaped by the Word,” as Mulholland phrases it, the links between Word and Spirit, doctrine and morality, and truth and grace can be made for skeptics.⁷

Relativism

The unchurched, de-churched, and religiously allergic are often reticent to accept any assertion or idea as absolutely true. The reference preferred at the present time is “my truth,” which usually means the content of one’s self-defined and fully owned beliefs. A good example of the use of the term “my truth” is found in a recent blog post:

Hello, I am Jenny Learning to stand in my truth has become more or less a way of life for me and in the beginning it was not easy. I had lived for so long trying to please or feel accepted by others that I really didn’t know what my truth was. All I knew to do was live a life as defined by others, by the society I lived in and by what was acceptable to others that were important to me at the time.⁸

From Jenny’s point of view, her truth is different from anything defined by others, especially by society and its norms. So she claims the society (or the Church) might make

⁶ Cox, *The Future of Faith*, 5-14.

⁷ Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 49-63. Mulholland promotes a formational reading of Scripture as a counterbalance to informational reading.

⁸ Jennifer Martin, “Ascending into My Truth,” Spiritual School of Ascension website, <http://www.ascendpress.org/articles/affiliates/AscendingTruth.htm> (accessed March 8, 2011).

about what is true are suspect if Jenny feels them as impositions from outside herself. For such a person, the quest is to find her truth through the lens of her experience, rather than to interpret her experiences through the lens of Her Truth (whatever that is discovered to be). This mindset poses huge obstacles for the Christian who might engage Jenny in conversation, since Jenny's basis can only be a sharing of equally valid "truths" with each other. The missional challenge is to enter a process of discovery, intent on finding together what is true not only for both parties in the informative conversation, but for all people. This approach does not require that one view the Scriptures as propositional truth—a very modernist way of thinking—but does require that the missional teacher ultimately believes what the Scriptures teach is true, specifically because it comes from God and not from oneself. "What the Scriptures teach is true" will be explored more fully in Chapter 5.

Learning in Social Settings Rather Than in the Classroom

The small group movement of the 1970s, represented by Louis Evans' book, *Covenant to Care*, introduced a new generation of church people to the relational aspect of spiritual nurture.⁹ Prior to that innovation, the Sunday school programs that blossomed in the post-war 1950s were didactic and informational. In contrast, so-called covenant groups, committed to group Bible study, personal sharing, and prayer, addressed the relational and formational side of Scripture learning. Simultaneously, in public schools, teachers were beginning to incorporate collaborative learning methods into the

⁹ Louis H. Evans, Jr., *Covenant to Care* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1982).

curriculum.¹⁰ A classroom of the 1950s, with forty grade-school students lined up in rows of desks, was replaced in the 1980s with worktables at which four or more students interacted with a project. Many of those children have grown into adulthood preferring to work in groups, to learn in social settings, or to talk things through rather than to listen and absorb. This learning practice predisposes the unchurched, de-churched, and spiritually allergic to resist classroom instruction. If the only location and method of Christian teaching is the classroom featuring one-way communication (teacher to students), young adults especially are going to feel out of their element. This unease often translates into resistance, but the issue is forced only if Christians in the missional setting insist on retaining the orderly teaching environment they can fully control, the classroom.

Collaborative learning offers some rich possibilities, however, well within the parameters of biblical example, for reaching the hard-to-get. Christian teachers should feel energized by the existence of alternatives to the classroom setting. Part Three explores several biblical models, supported by contemporary educational theories, which offer the missional teacher creative options for engagement with the unchurched.

Consumer Mentality

The last point of resistance to Christian teaching among the unchurched, de-churched, and religiously allergic rests on the consumer value system that was first prominent among Baby Boomers. People “shop around” for the spiritual teaching that will “work for them.” Oprah’s 2006 promotion of *The Secret*, which asserts, “like attracts

¹⁰ Barbara Leigh Smith and Jean T. MacGregor, “What Is Collaborative Learning?” *Collaborative Learning: A Sourcebook for Higher Education*, ed. Anne Goodsell et al (University Park, PA: National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, Pennsylvania State University, 1992), 10-29. This text also contains an excellent bibliography on the origins of collaborative learning among adults.

like” and “your thoughts are the magnet that draws your reality to you,” is still, seven years later, featured on *Oprah.com* in a seventeen-page spread of testimonials. Nan Akasha, a “Wealth Esteem & Life Design Coach and Mindset Expert,” interprets *The Secret* on her *Create Your Own Reality Now!* website: “When everyone realizes, believes, and acts from knowing they are the only power in their lives and they can have what they want and it has nothing to do with anyone else . . . we can all have fun enjoying our creations and being happy!”¹¹

The difficulty this mindset presents for the orthodox Christian is multifaceted, but not insurmountable. The consumer mentality places the shopper’s desires, pleasures, and will at the center; if the customer is not happy, the customer goes elsewhere; “what works” varies in definition from person to person and from generation to generation; and the individual is in complete charge of consumption. Reality proves to be less controllable, however, when life unfolds in the trials and tribulations one would not choose, and yet they seem to happen anyway. It is a difficult task to help the spiritual consumer accept the inevitability of suffering, of circumstances not going the preferred way, and at the same time holding up the image of a loving God who has every person’s best interest at heart. And yet, precisely because this is a mystery—different from a secret—Baby Boomers and postmoderns alike can be drawn into serious consideration of its truth. The hope is that a patient missional teacher is present and available to guide this contemplation of the mysteries (sin and redemption, death and life, disease and thriving).

¹¹ Nan Akasha, “Louise Hay & ‘The Secret’ & law of attraction were on Oprah again!” *Create Your Own Reality Now!* blog, entry posted 2009, <http://www.createyourownrealitynow.com/blog/louise-hay-the-secret-law-of-attraction-were-on-oprah-again/> (accessed March 8, 2011).

Ideally, this conversation would go right to the heart of the four philosophical questions, especially “What is the good life?”

Resistance of Potential Christian Teachers

Over the last four years, as the topic of “reclaiming the ministry of teaching in the missional setting” has taken root in my mind, spurred reading, and generated conversation among pastoral colleagues, I have been surprised to discover vigorous resistance to the whole idea among ministry practitioners. This paper is addressing the concerns sometimes very forcefully expressed that “this generation cannot be taught,” or that “teaching only alienates the unchurched—don’t do it!” or some other equally paralyzing caution. The implication is that teaching postmoderns or the religiously allergic will do more harm than good. The greatest harm, according to these naysayers, is turning people off, losing them, and losing future opportunities to bring them to Christ.

Pastors certainly have been disappointed by a seeming lack of interest in their classes among the unchurched. Two years in a row, one Bay Area church offered a fantastic one-day workshop on parenting. Ten thousand flyers were distributed in neighborhoods and schools, a stellar roster of fifty great speakers was assembled, a lovely lunch was prepared, and the church’s hospitality was set in motion to make the event accessible to the community. Only a handful of people showed up. Each one of them thought the event was fantastic, and it was; but even they asked the question, “Where *is* everybody? There should have been three hundred people here to enjoy this.” Experiences like this dampen the enthusiasm of church leaders to “reach out to the community” with educational opportunities.

This illustration highlights part of the problem: teaching ministry is seen primarily as an attraction to draw people comfortable enough with the church environment to enter into a learning situation. The people of interest in this paper are the very people who are not comfortable with the church environment—the unchurched, de-churched, and religiously allergic. A missional approach to them entails leaving the safety of the church campus behind, getting to know them and building trust on their own turf, and ultimately engaging them in informative conversation that may be the only Christian teaching they ever receive. This approach does not satisfy, for instance, a Baby Boomer’s love of efficiency or reliance on church resources, but entails very personal engagement. If a workshop or seminar seemed eventually to be needed and wanted within the missional setting, then a planning group should find a place other than the church, but right at the heart of the neighborhood, in which to hold it. The irony of this recommendation is noted, given that in many communities the church historically has been the heart of the neighborhood; but socially and relationally in the twenty-first century, it may stand as an irrelevant shell memorializing a bygone era.

Even if Christian disciples recover from their reliance upon the campus-centered ministry of attraction, there are other internal obstacles to overcome in order to establish a ministry of teaching in the missional setting. The following points of resistance are derived from thirty years of experience with and exposure to (mostly) Christian adults who have been offered ministry opportunities now called missional. Because this list gathers impressions accumulated from experience and not from formal data collection, it is presented as a guide for contemplation and personal examination of conscience, consistent with the psalmist’s prayer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me

and know my thoughts” (Ps 139:23). The potential obstacles to a Christian’s wholehearted participation in missional teaching include the following: holding a negative view of the target audience, fearing rejection, putting stronger emphasis on the osmosis approach to information transfer, suffering from latent relativism or even doubt about the veracity of the faith, and abdicating the teaching role to a few experts who know how to engage the spiritually hard-to-get.

A Negative View of the Target Audience

Christians, especially those with some distance from their original conversion, can make assumptions or develop negative attitudes about teaching the lost. These assumptions and attitudes discourage disciples from thinking creatively about how missional teaching might be enacted. Many potential Christian teachers assume that the unchurched view the biblical narrative or the gospel as irrelevant, intimidating, or unwelcome. Based on a perception that worldly people have made their choices and are now unreachable, these assumptions cut short what could be a very fruitful avenue of self-evaluation, namely, an assessment of how the church came to be perceived as irrelevant, intimidating, or unwelcoming and what could be done to counteract the perception.

Christians can harbor fear toward the unchurched, de-churched, and religiously allergic for other reasons as well. The elderly congregation at First Presbyterian Church of Concord feared high school students fanning out into town after school was dismissed for the day. Admittedly, it looked like a rough crowd: hundreds of students—from diverse cultures and backgrounds, exhibiting piercings and tattoos, revealing or unkempt

outfits, and social recklessness—would drift into Todos Santos Plaza adjacent to the church. The fact that they were getting ice cream cones or stopping at the ATM or picking up items from the drugstore (all very normal activities) was lost on parishioners who could not see past their appearance. This fear can also present itself in judgment, if the observer of popular culture sees tattoos, vulgar language, uninhibited sexuality, or even poverty as indicators of immorality. These negative attitudes toward potential disciples must be overcome in order to relate to them for the sake of demonstrating a Christ-centered way of life. For this reason, the potential teacher in the missional setting must become selectively blind, deaf, and dumb in order to enter this world of “aliens and strangers” (Eph 2:19), to see them, hear them, and communicate with them effectively. This incarnation is essential for missional teaching, but can only be accomplished in the way Jesus did it: “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:17). What makes this possible is a genuine love for the lost, a heart of compassion for their great spiritual need, and the courage to walk alongside them in order to address their heart-cries with God’s story.

Fear of Rejection

Fear often accompanies incarnational ministry, particularly the fear of rejection or loss of personal reputation. Contemporary Christians assuage this fear by staying nice, avoiding confrontation, and keeping their faith to themselves. While some patience may be required in anticipation of teachable moments, at some point believers are compelled to speak up and represent a Kingdom point of view. They are assured of Christ’s presence

and power at that moment of truth, and must trust that God will enable them to stand when it is required (Eph 6:10f).

Abdication to Learning by Osmosis

Christians timid about seizing teachable moments and speaking up about the faith often rely on the old adage, “Actions speak louder than words.” Here, they say, the quotation widely attributed to St. Francis of Assisi is very helpful: “Preach the gospel at all times; use words if necessary.” The contemporary application of the saint’s admonition is often heard as, “If we just stay in relationship, the Holy Spirit will do the work and I won’t have to say anything.” This conclusion is inconsistent with the message of the New Testament wherein there is a close relationship between actions and words, and both are necessary. On the negative side, Jesus vehemently warned against the Pharisees’ hypocrisy: “Do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach” (Mt 23:3). On the positive side, there is no question that people teach by their example, as every parent of a toddler has discovered. Jesus demonstrated this method throughout his public ministry, exemplified by his washing the disciples’ feet at the last supper (Jn 13:3-16). It must be noted, however, that Jesus explained his actions and their meaning in order to complete the instruction he intended. This is the point at which contemporary Christians often fall short, when they believe that their actions speak so loudly that words are not necessary to interpret them. In the secularized and biblically illiterate environment of the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, sacrificial or benevolent actions have no direct referent to the gospel unless disciples verbally connect them to their meaning or the motivation behind them. At the

very least, when a Christian is affirmed with a comment like, “Thank you for doing this [extraordinary, time-consuming thing] for me,” the answer should go beyond the typical, “Oh, no problem,” to an acknowledgment of God’s call, care, or commitment to the well-being of one’s neighbor. For example, “I’m doing this because God has blessed me with [fill in the blank], and you seem to be in need of the same blessing, so I am passing it along. Please accept it as coming from God out of his great love for you.”

Latent Relativism and Doubt

A more disturbing sign of unwillingness among Christians to hold missional conversations is spiritual doubt. Sometimes this takes the form of a demure protest: “Who am I to say that what I know is truer or better than your knowledge?” Wrapped in the postmodern environment that is by nature skeptical, Christians must sometimes take unpopular stands based on God’s Word. If, however, they are internally troubled by the possibility that the Bible is outdated, inaccurate, unreliable, or insufficient, or that Jesus is only one savior among many, they are not likely to have conviction in their conversations with unbelievers. Doubt creates instability, according to the apostle James (Jas 1:7), and instability implies that the foundation is unsteady or cracked. So a prerequisite for Christians who desire to represent the gospel in informative conversation is confidence—not self-righteousness, not arrogance, not shrillness—in God’s story. If missional teachers have doubts that only Jesus provides redemption to all who ask, or that other religious teachings are equally valid and effective for salvation, then they will find themselves off-balance in the rough-and-tumble of informative conversation with unbelievers.

Reliance on the Experts

The last obstacle to potential missional teachers is the unhealthy reliance on teaching experts. Perfectly intelligent, spiritually passionate, and socially adept men and women can park themselves in a packaged Bible study curriculum for years, and at the end still be unable to teach others what they have learned. *Christianity Today* writer Sarah Pulliam Bailey identifies Beth Moore as “the most popular Bible teacher in America,” judging by the number of people who have attended her “Living Proof Live” conferences or bought her books.¹² Her teaching packages—and those of John Ortberg, Rick Warren, Max Lucado, and Phil Yancey to name just a few—on various Bible topics are ubiquitous in local churches, where group leaders rely on her talks and writings for content and small group discussion questions.¹³ The mere quantity of packaged material available may enable a student to reproduce the course in a classroom setting, but it does not equip that student to teach from the Bible in unscripted situations such as the missional setting. To equip men and women as potential missional teachers requires an intentional focus on teaching them to teach others what they learn, without the props of prepackaged curricula. This is a learning goal, distinct from the original information transfer, that must inform the preparation of Fuller Seminary students, for instance, who are preparing for missional ministry.

It is helpful to put some historical perspective on this last obstacle. In the sixteenth century, Calvin cautioned against placing ultimate confidence in the human teacher rather than in the Subject of the teaching:

¹² Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Why Women Want Moore,” *Christianity Today*, August 2010, 21.

¹³ See, for example, the Christian Books Distributors catalogue, which lists over six thousand entries under “Bible Studies & Curriculum,” at <http://www.christianbook.com/> (accessed March 24, 2011).

Now the only way to build up the church is for the ministers themselves to endeavor to preserve Christ's authority for himself; this can only be secured if what he has received from his Father be left to him, namely, that he alone is the schoolmaster of the church. . . . Accordingly, . . . we must remember here that whatever authority and dignity the Spirit in Scripture accords to [teachers of the church], it is wholly given not to [teachers] personally, but to the ministry to which they have been appointed; or to the Word, whose ministry is entrusted to them.¹⁴

The twenty-first-century Church is no less dependent upon ministry professionals for regular biblical teaching than the sixteenth century's Geneva. All one must do to prove this is to peruse the church bulletins and newsletters promoting upcoming classes to count how many of those classes are taught by members of the pastoral staff. Pastors and ministry equippers would do well, for the sake of missional engagement, to enable non-professionals to develop teaching methods and skills that are responsive to the needs of the unchurched.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, the points of resistance to missional teaching were defined and explored from biblical and societal points of view. Reticence to engage in this disciple-shaping activity is found in both the potential learner—the unchurched, de-churched, and spiritually allergic—and, somewhat surprisingly, the potential Christian teacher. The target groups avoid church programs, suffer from truth-allergies, possess a relativist view of reality, exhibit a preference for collaborative learning, and operate primarily from a consumer mentality. Disciple-making teachers, on the other hand, still prefer the attractional model for doing church, harbor negative attitudes toward the unchurched, fear rejection, hope that osmosis is sufficient for information transfer, suffer from their

¹⁴ Calvin, *ICR*, IV.8.1–2:1150.

own relativism and doubt, and hope, like Moses, that God will “send someone else” (like a published expert) to do it (Ex 4:13). These two positions—resistant learner and resistant teacher—create a gap in practice, and ways must be found to bridge that gap in order to foster an effective learning environment where both groups can have informative conversation with each other.

Bridging the gap will depend on some significant paradigm shifts among Christian teachers, creative use of tools and resources, and a realistic set of learning outcomes. Chapter 5 addresses the changes necessary for teaching in the missional setting to be effective.

CHAPTER 5

THE MISSIONAL BRIDGE

San Francisco's Golden Gate stretches across the San Francisco Bay, with the bluffs of Marin County to the north and the forested hillside of the Presidio to the south. These two points represent the gospel-living Christian community and the unchurched, de-churched, and spiritually allergic separated by a watery chasm (see figure 4). The Great Commission challenges Jesus' followers to find a way to the other side, in order to make disciples. Missional teaching is the bridge between Christians and the spiritually hard-to-get.



Figure 4. The Bridge between Two Worlds

The obstacles to missional teaching, as described in Chapter 4, can discourage Christian disciples from their commission to cross the bridge. However, it is imperative that they clear away these hurdles so the issue at hand is not whether or not disciples should engage potential disciples with the gospel, but rather how to do so. Dismissing the Great Commission is not an option.

Missional teaching requires the Church essentially to throw out the “traditional church” playbook and start over with new rules, new assumptions, new stories, and a new scorecard—to remove the conceptual rubble.¹ This new playbook incorporates a significant shift in teachers’ thinking and change in their attitudes, a clear vision and empathy for those most resistant to the gospel, knowledge of the essential core of the faith, tools and resources for their ministry equipping, and a set of realistic learning goals. Meeting these conditions would clearly require the Christian community to adapt its methods of disciple-making.

Shifts in Thinking and Attitude

Each of these requirements is explained in this chapter as though to a pastor or a congregation trying to make the shift from the attractional model of doing church to the missional model. They are also useful to the missional small group already staked out in the neighborhood, apartment complex, or recreational place. It is hoped that small groups can set goals and establish priorities and methods for reaching the unchurched.

¹ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, xvii.

From Programming to People

According to Reggie McNeal in *Missional Renaissance*, an important missional shift the Church must undergo is from a focus on program to a concentration on people development.² George Barna's research into the development of Christian disciples supports this view. The difficulty of this shift is partially attributed to the way the Church measures success:

Consider our currently popular "discipleship" metrics: worship service and class attendance, small group involvement, tithing, reading the Bible, praying regularly, knowing core biblical content and engaging in some form of service. Those can be helpful activities, if they serve a purpose beyond being religious and providing an external image of spiritual intensity.

Don't you think the Church would be radically different . . . if we measured brokenness, surrender, submission, God-love, other-love, dependence on God, intimate prayer, waiting on God, lifestyle worship, Spirit-reformed character, intentional silence, producing spiritual fruit, and the like?³

This scorecard change is no small undertaking, and the process of transformation tends to expose some deep-seated insecurities within congregational life. Pastors and church boards naturally feel something significant has happened if they have established a program at the church. The appeal of programming is the efficiency of gathering people with similar needs or affinities into one group for mass instruction. However, people tend to compartmentalize their lives into categories such as work, play, family, politics, and church. A church program fits into a time slot where some learning activity takes place, but once the students leave that compartment, there is no guarantee that life will change as a result. This is not to say that the well-developed programs of the three churches described in Chapter 3, for instance, did not do some good or invite people into faith as a

² McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 10-12.

³ George Barna, *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus* (Ventura, CA: Metaformation Inc., 2011), 190.

way of life, but church programs tend to equip people to function within those programs and not necessarily to integrate their lessons into everyday life or to enable them to subsequently teach them to others in the missional setting.

A program-driven church can stifle creativity by its standardization, and, particularly as programs grow in size, people become incidental to the goal or merely resources to perpetuate the program's existence. A programmatic approach is particularly deadening in the missional setting because it tends to script people's spiritual journeys, over-design their learning activities, and rely on giving information without proof that life-change has occurred. This does not mean that a class or forum or some other program element might not eventually be appropriate and welcomed by the unchurched, but it is not the first step for the unreached, whose trust must be earned by informal and individualized means first.

The alternative to be considered in the missional setting is a people-development approach that customizes instruction to individual participants based on their spiritual starting points. The approach does not limit exposure to a one-hour weekly class time, but thrives in ongoing dialogue throughout the week. Information transfer, or "telling," is replaced by informative "conversation." Learning is promoted through debriefing as the would-be disciple shares how the application is going, what he or she is discovering, and what is needed next. An informative conversation like this is not experienced as an activity but more as a relational engagement promoting faith as a way of life. The goal is Barna's "maximum faith" not just "enough faith to get by."⁴

⁴ Barna, *Maximum Faith*, xi.

One way to promote this kind of personal growth is to prepare disciples from the start to teach others what they are learning. As an example, the basic strategy of *The Bethel Series* is for the pastor to teach a cohort of future Bethel teachers for an intense eighteen months, and then to commission them to teach the series to congregational members. Knowing they are going to teach it later enhances their learning. This strategy of disciple-making has considerable support from educational researchers looking for ways to improve retention and reasoning in students. Vanderbilt and Stanford University studies led by Gautam Biswas show that people learn best when they teach: “People who prepared to teach others to take a quiz on a passage learned the passage better than those who prepared to take the quiz themselves. . . . Students preparing to teach made statements about how the responsibility to teach forced them to gain deeper understanding of the materials.”⁵

The Biswas study goes on to describe the benefits of “teaching it forward”: the teacher’s explanations become better organized, the teacher’s sense of responsibility is stronger, and the teacher’s ability to assess student progress improves.⁶ For the present purpose, however, the study also points to the necessity of an intentional effort to prepare a student for teaching as a way to maximize that student’s present learning. Missional communities would do well to incorporate this very practical suggestion into any teaching/learning experience, both in equipping missional teachers and in the missional

⁵ Gautam Biswas et al, “Learning by Teaching: A New Agent Paradigm for Educational Software,” *Applied Artificial Intelligence: An International Journal* 19, no. 3 & 4 (2005): 366, http://w3.isis.vanderbilt.edu/publications/archive/Biswas__G_3_0_2005_Learning_b.pdf (accessed March 22, 2011).

⁶ “Teaching it forward” is an application of the concept popularized by the movie, *Pay It Forward*, directed by Mimi Leder, Warner Brothers, 2000.

teacher's informative conversations with the unchurched, de-churched, and spiritually allergic. A method for accomplishing these goals in the missional setting is suggested in Chapter 7.

In order to activate missional engagement that is informative and even instructional, pastors and church leaders must let their members experiment outside the bounds of church programs. Rather than keep disciples tied to a constricted schedule of weekly responsibilities on campus, they must unleash those who are ready (a concept that will be discussed in Chapter 8) and allow them to take the Church, in small missional communities, into the world.

From Pastor as Primary Teacher to People as Interdependent Learners

The second shift in thinking that must occur for a missional strategy to take hold belongs both to the pastor and to the members of the congregation. Pastors especially are tempted to keep control by insisting on doing all the teaching themselves, but their assumed indispensability paralyzes the Church and severely limits its impact. One person cannot do it all, nor should one (for health, if for no other reason). The pastor must share the role of teacher with others, in order to equip them to become missional teachers beyond the church's campus. The Body of Christ has been endowed with diverse spiritual gifts, and pastors especially should welcome those gifts and turn them loose to be creative, personal, and responsive in their neighborhoods, workplaces, or homes.

The members of the congregation must willingly take responsibility for their own equipping and prepare to be launched into ministry as interdependent teachers and learners—those who learn from each other—in the missional setting. According to Barna,

the fact that only 1 percent of self-professed Christians is “broken, surrendered, submitted, and loving,” that is, are taking the faith seriously enough to orient their entire lives around it, indicates the difficulty of (and resistance to) ministry interdependence.⁷ The specific nature and form of this interdependent learning environment will be described fully in Chapter 7. For now the focus is on willingness to be sent and equipped for teaching ministry independent of the professional pastor.

A genuine tension exists in this area. On the one hand, many pastors have received special training in the Bible and theology and (perhaps) are quite gifted to teach. They are called to congregations who commit themselves to sit under the preaching or teaching of this minister. The pastor-teacher has a weekly opportunity to deliver thoughtful sermons and/or to teach classes from the Bible. These activities are commonly considered central to the ministerial call to proclaim the Word of God, and since they figure prominently in the Apostle Paul’s view of the healthy, functioning church (see the fivefold ministry he identifies in Ephesians 4:11), they must not be supplanted. On the other hand, when a pastor gets too expert at preaching-teaching, or charisma overtakes charism, or the role becomes an exclusive realm, the congregation finds it easy to let the one minister do all the work. People tend to sit back and enjoy the show, to be satisfied with being fed, to take some pride in the stature of the one in the pulpit, or to defer to the superior skills of the professional.

The solution to this very real tension is an attitude shift on the part of pastors and their congregations. The pastor-teacher is called by Ephesians 4 to “equip the saints for the work of ministry,” which means taking the steps necessary to enable others to teach

⁷ Barna, *Maximum Faith*, 36.

also. The prerequisite of this equipping, of course, is a willingness to apprentice disciples (which is time-consuming), delegate teaching responsibility (which may be scary), and finally to release the new teachers with a blessing to teach it forward (which may be grief-producing). After such an effort to shape another's life and ministry, a pastor is asked to let that apprentice go to minister beyond in-house, on-campus programs to form missional community and carry out informative conversation in the world. This is a tough sell but a necessary mental and methodological shift.

On the part of church members, Ephesians 4:11-16 urges the saints to grow up spiritually and to participate fully in the work of ministry. The practical implication of Paul's instruction is that Christians must give up the spiritual couch-potato routine and make a lifestyle commitment to aerobic discipling. Barna describes the challenge: "Every believer who doggedly pursues transformation with God will spend oodles of time outside of their comfort zone—emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, relationally, and behaviorally."⁸

From Teaching as Delivery to Learning in Dialogue

The mutual learning that can take place in informative conversation strengthens the possibility that the unchurched person will actually acquire some new knowledge or insight into the human condition or God's grace and truth. So far, the emphasis has been on the openness (or resistance) of the unchurched to hear what a Christian might have to say, but it goes the other way around as well. The missional teacher should be open to learning from the religiously allergic person. A truly open conversation can become a

⁸ Barna, *Maximum Faith*, 30.

remarkable teachable moment—for both dialogue partners—when the “teacher” becomes the “learner” and can model the sort of “aha moment” one would hope the newcomer might experience also. The dynamics of this dialogic approach, to be explored in Chapter 6, are the basis for a widely used method for engaging the unchurched in spiritual conversation called *The Alpha Course*.⁹

When First Presbyterian Church of Concord incorporated *Alpha* into its regular offerings, a tension was experienced between those who felt their role as small group leaders was to tell and those who embraced the *Alpha* philosophy of facilitating. One leader, Sylvia, felt most at home as a lecturer. In her *Alpha* small group, she had great difficulty refraining from answering every “discussion” question she asked, believing that her role was to communicate what the Bible said on the present topic. Unfortunately, to the unbelievers in her group, she came across as dogmatic and insensitive, and she seemed unwilling to hear where they were coming from. Sylvia demonstrated the church’s traditional delivery of scriptural truth: “Tell them.”

In contrast, another small group leader named Brad took an approach that was almost polar opposite. He was the consummate nice guy, asking open-ended questions that drew out the participants’ opinions and speculations. In this role, however, he never corrected, summarized, or otherwise presented a biblical point of view. He related well with his small group, but they began to drift away, dissatisfied with the class they were hoping would answer at least some of their questions. Unbridled open-mindedness misses

⁹ Nicky Gumbel, *The Alpha Course: Explore the Meaning of Life*, published by Alpha USA (alphausa.org) is a curriculum designed to foster relaxed discussion about Christian faith and its application to everyday life. Of particular interest here is *The Alpha Course: Small Group Leaders’ Training DVD for Hosts and Helpers* (Deerfield, IL: Alpha North America, 2003), [http://www.alpharesources.org/ Small_Group_Training_DVD_for_H_P746.cfm](http://www.alpharesources.org/Small_Group_Training_DVD_for_H_P746.cfm) (accessed July 7, 2011).

the opportunity to clarify key content of the gospel when this knowledge becomes the issue. Brad modeled the approach, “Every opinion is valid.”

Somewhere between Sylvia’s dogmatic and Brad’s laissez-faire approaches, the missional teacher finds a shepherding role. In this position, the group facilitator promotes informative conversation, preferably with an inductive rather than a deductive process. As conversational shepherd, this guide protects the safety of the emotional environment, provides appropriate resources to chew on, and nudges participants in the right direction. When the sheep need food, sources are identified and perhaps even served in chewable bites. When the sheep stray into the weeds, the shepherd gently prods them back onto the path. The spiritual shepherd provides a balance between dogmatism and passivity by discerning the difference between helpful discussions leading toward the truth and doctrinally damaging speculations that must be answered. The style and content of those answers reveal the orthodox but incarnational mindset of the missional teacher. More will be written on a suggested methodology in Chapter 8.

From Information Transfer to Life Transformation

Another mental shift can be demonstrated by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a worldwide campus ministry of evangelism and discipleship. In the past fifty years, the organization has demonstrated the shift from teaching as the transfer of abstract concepts to discovery for life transformation. This shift was necessary as college students leaned toward postmodernism, but the wider Church can also learn from InterVarsity’s transition the necessity and importance of making this shift.

The traditional “inductive Bible study” method, promoted particularly by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship but widely incorporated throughout the Church and evangelistic endeavors, calls for Observation, Interpretation, and Application.¹⁰ Through rigorous study of unmarked manuscripts, such as the Gospel of Mark, college students are taught how to observe the biblical text (answering the question “What does it say?”), interpret it in historical and literary context (answering the question “What does it mean?”), and apply it to everyday life (answering the question “What does it mean to me?”). Students in Stanford Christian Fellowship, an InterVarsity chapter of which I was a part for four years in the early 1970s, were academic by nature and would often get stuck on Observation and Interpretation, and would find it more difficult to push through to Application. Depending on one’s denominational background, it was more comfortable to talk about the concepts and ideas than it was to find their concrete application for today (still rather abstract) and ultimately to order one’s life around them.

In 1999, InterVarsity adapted its original model and called it “Communal Discovery Study Method.” Reflecting on postmodernism’s impact on students and theological developments, the InterVarsity paper entitled “Enhancements to Inductive Bible Study” listed several new considerations for group leaders to incorporate into their student Bible studies. What did not change was InterVarsity’s commitment to the Word of God and affirmation of its truth and divine origin, but the new emphasis of these “enhancements” had to do with meaningful experience of Jesus in his Word and the balance between goals of imparting information and inspiring personal transformation:

¹⁰ An excellent handbook explaining and applying the inductive method is Oletta Wald, *The New Joy of Discovery in Bible Study*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002).

1. The passion of the teacher for Jesus and His Word is the key.
2. We seek both the truth of the passage and to experience Jesus in His Word.
3. We are dealing with a living Word, not a dead letter.
4. Reliving, or entering the text emotionally, is an important method of observation.
5. There must be a balance between the intellectual/analytical and the experiential/contemplative in Bible study.
6. Forming good questions about the text is a key to interpretation.
7. Studying in community is vital.
8. Teachers need to also be learners, and see the learners as teacher.
9. The experience of the reader needs to be woven into the study as it goes along.
10. The narrative nature of Scripture needs to be emphasized.
11. Inductive Bible study helps us find main points, but they need to be held with humility and openness to further light.
12. Bible study is an art, and needs to engage our creative and sensing side.
13. Inductive Bible study is about discovery.¹¹

Informative conversation around biblical teaching must have the transformation of the individual, in body, mind, soul, and spirit as its goal. This goal represents for many Christians a shift of focus from the purely cognitive dissemination of information toward the affective experience of reality. Truth and experience, analysis and contemplation, thinking and feeling all represent the necessary balance to be sought in the missional setting. If this is accomplished successfully, then the missional approach will be more dialogue and less delivery, and the opportunity for feedback and mutual learning surely will result in transformed lives.

Keeping the Target Group in Sight

One characteristic of the target group—the unchurched, de-churched and religiously allergic in the missional setting—is often an adoption of a postmodern mindset, which has been described by Don Everts and Doug Schaupp: “So how do we

¹¹ InterVarsity/USA Bible Study Task Force, “Enhancements to Inductive Bible Study” (paper distributed among InterVarsity campus leaders, April 1999), <http://www.intervarsity.org/bible-studies/communal-discovery-method> (accessed March 25, 2011).

define postmodernity? It's how things are right now. It's the in between times. We are more experiential than propositional in our connection to truth. We are more communal than individualistic. We value authenticity over theory. We understand struggle more than naïve certainty. We are in process, and we will be different in ten or twenty years."¹² Especially in the case of postmodernism, the people of concern in the missional setting are a moving target. Generalities about the mindset of the target group carry the missional teacher only so far in identifying the needs and sensitivities of a specific, local group at a particular time.¹³ As God's Great Commission compels Christian disciples to form a missional community, they must refine the description of the target group specifically in their neighborhood, workplace, or third place. An essential part of the missional commitment is embedding oneself in the community, tribe, language group, or mission area to be reached with the gospel. As this incarnation deepens, Christians develop eyes to see genuine need and ears to hear the heart-cries of the lost.

An assessment of needs of a particular target group is aided by finding answers to the following questions: 1) Who are they, in demographic terms? 2) What is the nature or origin of their resistance to anything having to do with the Church? 3) What are their interests? 4) Where do their biggest problems seem to lie? 5) Whom do they admire or to whom do they listen? 6) What is their chosen means of personal expression? 7) What

¹² Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us about Their Path to Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 11, n1.

¹³ For one striking description of the youthful target audience, see Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*. For a remarkable window into the postmodern mindset and approach to Scripture, see Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2006).

proves to be “loving” to them? Most of these questions can be answered by living and interacting with them in a natural way and making observations over time.

The process of making these observations among the unchurched enables the disciple of Jesus to discover the heartfelt questions that motivate unbelievers and to develop empathy for their life experiences. The powerful lesson of Mother Teresa’s fifty-year “dark night of the soul” was her gradual awareness that God allowed her to experience her personal desperation and spiritual isolation so that she could identify completely with the desperation of Calcutta’s poorest: “Her darkness was an identification with those she served: she was drawn mystically into the deep pain they experienced as a result of feeling unwanted and rejected and, above all, by living without faith in God.”¹⁴ Her life became the bridge between the poor and Jesus, because she was in intimate relationship with both. The missional teacher, while cultivating a strong faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ, is called to a profound empathy with the people who have lost sight of Christ or his church. Incarnation leads to identification, which leads to a common language, which leads to informative conversation that is sensitive to the specific culture discovered by the missional community.

Readiness to Share the Essentials of the Faith

Christians are invited to engage in informative conversation on the biblical metanarrative, the Christian faith, and life application without apology whenever it is helpful. The message encompasses the entire biblical narrative anchored in God as Creator embarking on a project to redeem humanity and all of his creation. Jesus is seen

¹⁴ Brian Kolodiejchuk, M.C., *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light—The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 216.

not only as a personal Savior (which he is) but also as Lord of all, sent by God to usher in the Kingdom of God and set this broken world aright.

The Essential Core Content of Missional Teaching

Many people have offered their own versions of the Gospel in a nutshell,¹⁵ but N. T. Wright provides a very helpful framework for remembering and organizing the essential thread of the biblical message, which he calls “God’s Story in Five Acts” illustrated by figure 5.¹⁶ It is not necessary for the unbeliever to know absolutely every element of Christian doctrine before being invited to believe in Jesus. However, “God’s Story in Five Acts” gives a framework for the general areas of discussion. The level of detail one shares must be discerned in each situation, based on the needs of the moment. The themes of the story to be told to the unchurched, de-churched, and religiously allergic in the missional setting are described in Wright’s chart.

¹⁵ Myron S. Augsburger et al, “What’s the Good News? Nine evangelical leaders define the Gospel,” *Christianity Today*, February, 7, 2000, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/february7/3.46.html> (accessed April 24, 2011).

¹⁶ N.T. Wright, “A Church Shaped by Mission” (lectures, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, February 24 and 26, 2009).

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GOD'S STORY IN FIVE ACTS (from N. T. Wright)

ACT 1 CREATION	ACT 2 FALL	ACT 3 ISRAEL	ACT 4 JESUS	ACT 5 US NOW
Adam and Eve in Eden; four-fold harmony All of creation as it was intended to be	Adam & Eve in rebellion; four-fold disharmony, sin and death become a part of human experience	The covenant people from Abraham (blessed to be a blessing) through Exile (displaced, planted, waiting)	Incarnation, introducing the Kingdom of God; culminating in crucifixion and resurrection! (The turning → point of history)	P E N T E C O S T N E W C R E A T I O N
			THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS INAUGURATED	KINGDOM IS "LIVED INTO"
			THE KINGDOM IS RESTORED! THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH (Rev. 21)	THE KINGDOM IS RESTORED! THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH (Rev. 21) Creation Made New Human Beings Restored and Commissioned for Dominion (Gen. 1:28 → Rev. 5:10)

Figure 5. "God's Story in Five Acts." Source: N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 140-42.

Act 1, Creation (Genesis 1 and 2)

God has always existed and he brought everything else into being. Adam and Eve, the first humans, lived in unhindered relationship with God. Life was good, and human beings had access to everything but the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The scenes in this Act are characterized by harmony between God and human beings, between human beings themselves, and between them and all creation. God wanted to be known and so revealed himself to humanity through his creation and presence.

Act 2, the Fall (Genesis 3-11).

Adam and Eve were not satisfied with the limit placed upon them and wanted to know more than God wanted to tell them. The evil one enticed Eve (and then Adam) to eat from the forbidden tree. This act alienated them from their Maker, caused dysfunction in their relationship with each other, and put them out of tune with creation. This was not only a personal tragedy, but a global disaster as well. The second act highlights the dissatisfaction, the pride, and the rebellion of Adam and Eve as the beginning of the hard life experienced by everyone. The human experience outside of Eden became fractured and ultimately depraved. God caused a flood to wipe out every family but Noah's, in order to start over, but even so, it became clear that humanity needed divine help to redeem the situation.

Act 3, Israel (Genesis 12-Malachi 4)

Act Three depicts the way God chose to reintroduce his purposes to the world. By calling Abram out of obscurity to be the father of a great nation, God identified his mission and the people who would represent it in the world. What unfolds between

Abraham's migration and the Exile into Babylon is the establishment of Israel and the grand exhibition of God's reign through the Israelites to the world for generations. God taught them what he wanted the whole world to know about him and the covenant of grace he had put in place: the meaning of life, the purpose of creation, the nature of community, and how human beings could get back on track to participate in God's mission. God prepared Israel to receive the One that God was sending to redeem the world and put all things back in order.

Act 4, Jesus (The Four Gospels)

The New Testament opens with Israel ruled by the Roman Empire, where God's Messiah was born for the purpose of redeeming Israel and the world. To this end, Jesus embodied God's mission in his crucifixion and resurrection. God sent his own Son Jesus to teach the Kingdom and demonstrate it as a way of life, so that humanity could get to know God and receive him and thereby receive the Life that he promised. Upon his resurrection, Jesus instructed the disciples to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit, after which they would have the power to be his witnesses all over the world.

Act 5, the Church (Acts-Revelation)

The final Act in God's play opens with the coming of the Holy Spirit, empowering Jesus' disciples to teach and preach and do as Jesus did. Every believer was promised the Holy Spirit, to indwell and empower that person for living a transformed life. The twenty-first century also stands within Act 5, but the Bible deflects the Church's vision forward to the New Heavens and New Earth that are described in the climax of the Book of Revelation. God's people are called to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God, in

right relationship with their Creator, with each other, and with the earth. Upon Jesus' return, the curse will be lifted, evil will be defeated once and for all, and God's servants will reign with God's authority over all Creation.

This is the full story depicted in a dramatic arc, emphasizing the narrative while holding fast to the doctrines classically formulated in the creeds and confessions. The testimony of the Church regarding God, humanity, divine revelation, incarnation, and reconciliation anchor one end of the missional bridge. Attention now turns to the other end of the bridge, where those who need the gospel's hope and direction are waiting.

Bridging to the World of the Unchurched

The religiously allergic, the de-churched, those who have had no exposure whatsoever to the Christian gospel, and the openly hostile, all have life-defining questions they would like answered. Avril Lavigne's song, "I'm With You," captures the heart cry of postmodern questioning: "Isn't anyone trying to find me? / Won't somebody come take me home?"¹⁷ If Christian disciples were equipped to hang out in their worlds, learn their language, find out what is important to them, and discover their yearnings, then a link to "God's Story in Five Acts" can be made. Depending on the starting (or stuck) point of one's conversation partner, the equipped disciple of Jesus can point to intersections with God's promise of New Creation, forgiveness of sin, true community, and Christ as Lord of the Kingdom of God.

In order to make the necessary links between God's story and an inquirer's story, three key areas must be familiar to missional teachers: the Bible, human nature, and

¹⁷ Avril Lavigne, "I'm With You," *Let Go*, Arista Records, Audio CD, 2002.

cultural milieu. Informative conversation will be genuinely helpful if the missional teacher can retell the overall story of God's redemption, show interest and insight into human development, and exercise wisdom in the use of resources that facilitate social connections. These will be addressed more fully in Chapter 8, but are outlined here.

Mastery of God's Story

The metanarrative, such as the one depicted in "God's Story in Five Acts" above, must be mastered. A postmodern person may not accept the concept that a metanarrative exists, but with help might be able to recognize a personal narrative and commonality with others that enables a wider view. What is essential, however, is for the believer to have a firm grasp of the one, big story of God's interaction with humankind.

Comprehension of Peoples' Stories

Active listening and compassionate presence among people who do not yet know God helps the missional teacher to identify the heart-cries and possible intersections to God's Story. A person who is at least willing to articulate questions may wish to explore possible answers in a mutually respectful and patient dialogue. Common presenting questions that any witness should be prepared to link to the gospel story begin with the list given in figure 6, which borrows from Erik Erikson's research.

1. I just don't know what I want or who I am anymore. → Who am I?
2. Why can't people marry whomever they choose, if it's all about love? → Is there any such thing as a "created order" to the universe?
3. How did it happen that human beings trashed the earth so badly? → Is there any way to restore the earth's balance and manage its resources sustainably?
4. Why did my friend get shot on the way home from school? → Why is there evil in the world?
5. What can I do about addiction in my life? → What does it mean to be truly free?
6. I feel alone in the world; doesn't anyone want to know me? → Who am I with?
7. Can't we all just try to get along? → How can we create world peace?
8. Why should I believe that anything is actually true? → What is truth?
9. Have I made a difference in anybody's life? → Who am I for?
10. I am afraid that the world is going to hell and that life has no purpose → Why am I here?
11. I'm afraid to live, but I'm afraid to die. → Is there life after death?

Figure 6. Questions That Believers Should Link to the Gospel Story¹⁸

These questions were arranged in order of their relationship to the five acts of God's Story. Questions about "the way things should be" relate to Creation (Act 1); questions about the evil or disharmony of human nature point to the Fall (Act 2); questions referring to belonging or community can be addressed by starting with Israel's context (Act 3); questions regarding the need for solutions, salvation, rescue, or new life are addressed in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Act 4); and questions about the Church, its history, its quirks or disappointments point to "the way things are now" in Act 5. Figure 7 illustrates of how these pieces fit together.

¹⁸ For the questions "Who am I," "Who am I with," "Who am I for," and "Why am I here," I am indebted to the research of Erik H. Erikson, particularly "The Eight Ages of Man" in *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1963), 247-74.

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QUESTIONS AS PORTALS INTO GOD’S STORY IN FIVE ACTS (from N. T. Wright)

Questions of:	Questions of:	Questions of:	Questions of:	Questions of:
<p>The meaning of life Freedom (its limits) Yearning for the good life Self-worth and identity Relationships, sexuality</p>	<p>Why am I addicted? Why do I do the things I know are wrong? Human beings: good or evil? The world is a mess</p>	<p>Progress, manifest destiny mindset Law Relationships Corporate identity God’s work in history Exile, displacement</p>	<p>Can we know God? What is truth? Inner peace? What is the solution to the mess we are in?</p>	<p>“I’m spiritual but don’t want anything to do with the church” The world is a mess; what can we do about it? Individualism Escapism</p>
<p>ACT 1 CREATION Adam and Eve in Eden Four-fold harmony (God, self, others, creation) All of creation as it was intended to be</p>	<p>ACT 2 FALL Adam & Eve in rebellion Four-fold disharmony Sin and death become a part of human experience</p>	<p>ACT 3 ISRAEL The covenant people from Abraham (blessed to be a blessing) through Exile (displaced, planted, waiting)</p>	<p>ACT 4 JESUS Incarnation, introducing the Kingdom of God Culminating in crucifixion and resurrection! (The turning → point of history)</p>	<p>ACT 5 US NOW IMPROVISATION: Continuing God’s mission while anticipating its fulfillment “Realized Eschatology”</p>
				<p>N E W C R E A T I O N</p>
				<p>P E N T E C O S T</p>
<p>THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS INAUGURATED</p>	<p>KINGDOM IS “LIVED INTO”</p>	<p>THE KINGDOM IS RESTORED! THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH Creation Made New Human Beings Restored Godly Dominion (Gen 1:28 → Rev 5:10)</p>		

Figure 7. Questions as Portals into “God’s Story in Five Acts.” Source: The bottom portion of this grid is taken from N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 140-42. The top tier of questions that has been added is original.

Linking the content of the gospel with the heart-cries of the unchurched is only possible in a caring relationship characterized by active listening and dialogue. Knowledge by itself has little potential to create change in a person's life, but compassionate caring for the person, coupled with essential, helpful information, can help the individual embrace the truth. Most wrenching questions have emerged out of disturbing experiences, which may have caused pain, anger, fear, or confusion, all deserving of Christian patience and love. Love in the missional teaching context, however, is also directed to the Object of study; the acquisition of knowledge about God is accompanied by deeper love for God. Wright articulates the connection between knowledge and love this way: "We are not studying facts in the abstract. . . . The Christian calling is to know the world with a knowledge that approximates to love. . . . Love both affirms the otherness of the Object while remaining in deep, close, and rich, subjective relationship to it. . . . Knowledge is a sub-branch of love rather than the other way around."¹⁹

What Christian teachers offer in the missional setting is a new perspective on the world. The Christian disciple should be available for informative conversation, and should carry it out with a clear understanding of God's nature, human nature, God's intention for creation, and God's process of restoring all things to their original glory. The disciple can be a faithful steward and representative of God's truth by creating a learning environment in which a godly perspective can be experienced.

¹⁹ N. T. Wright, "The Christian Challenge in the Postmodern World" (public lecture at Seattle Pacific University, May 18, 2005). This concept is developed from an educator's point of view by Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 117-44.

Using the Appropriate Tools and Resources

Missional teaching can bridge the gap between Christians and members of the prevailing culture if it adapts successfully to another challenge. In the twenty-first century, disciples of Jesus must still be in the world but not of it (Jn 15:19). In one specific application, this means the believer must both capitalize on technology and stand up to it in order to reach people who rely on those tools for communication.

Electronic social networks like Facebook and Twitter have become the living room of one's experience, especially for young people; eBooks are becoming accessible to more and more readers; and of course, the Internet is an instant source of information for anybody who wants to learn more on any topic. If Christians in missional community are not present to their neighbors by these means, they are going to miss tremendous opportunities to build trust and establish relationships, as well as share information when the teachable moment calls for it. Technology can also stand in the way of spiritual curiosity, if it is abused or misused. To some, the Internet opens the door to wisdom; to others, the web is the twenty-first-century version of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but its existence is almost unavoidable, and it is up to missional teachers to use it only for good and not for evil.

Familiarity with cultural media is also necessary as an avenue for understanding the vocabulary and values in which today's consumers are immersed. Popular culture is expressed in movies, television programs, art, music, advertizing, and theatre. When Christians are alert with a discerning eye and a listening ear, they can gain tremendous insight into what people are thinking and how they feel about the world around them.

Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor have explored the cultural realm in detail, and have arrived at this conclusion:

We have argued that the cultural artifacts we create and use change the way we live, from the religious to the sexual, the sacred to the profane. Rather than passing judgment on certain elements of pop culture to determine if they are “good” or “bad,” we’ve tried to analyze them and ask, “What are they doing? What do they represent? and What do they say about the world in which we live?” The latest pop stars may mean little to us, but they mean something significant to millions of teens around the globe. Determining what that meaning is might aid us in the future of Christian mission.²⁰

The challenge for teachers in the missional setting is twofold: first, to enter into a world that may seem foreign if not blasphemous in order to meet the unchurched, de-churched, or religiously allergic there; and secondly, to find in pop culture the metaphors, the mirrors, and the models that can carry Christian meaning to the missional setting. To the degree that these steps can be taken, culture and technology can help Christians engage in informative conversation with their unchurched neighbors.

Realistic Learning Outcomes

The last conceptual shift that alters the missional teacher’s effectiveness goes back to attitude and expectations. The disciple attempting to reclaim a proper ministry of teaching in the missional setting must prepare spiritually and psychologically (attitudinally) in order to honor the teaching/learning relationship and indicate a proper deference to God. One attitudinal shift requires the Christian to let go of any sense of competition in missional teaching. It is not necessary to “win” or to “prove” anything in order to be effective. One does not even have to be “right” all the time, while

²⁰ Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 295.

understanding that no Christian in honest relationship with God should be satisfied with being “wrong” (either in ignorance or complacency). Rather, the proper stance is to seek the Truth together, believing at any time that God through his Word can correct, refine beliefs, or otherwise set inquirer and teacher alike on a proper course intellectually. Retaining one’s touch with the wider Christian community is very helpful in this endeavor, keeping any individual saint humble and accountable.

The Christian in a teaching/learning situation can afford to lighten up the tone a bit by perceiving one’s role as seed-planter rather than harvester. Jesus himself made room for the difference in the Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:3-9) and his commissioning of his disciples into the harvest (Mt 9:37), and Paul was acutely aware of the tag-team approach to evangelism (1 Cor 3:5). Furthermore, the seed-planter more easily mixes the message with love if instruction is offered in digestible bites with lots of opportunity to chew.

Ultimately, while the hope remains that one’s missional teaching will result in the conversion or re-engagement of the unchurched, the reward for missional teaching is an internal recognition of faithfulness to a mysterious process God is directing. Every missional relationship is a hopeful one for the Christian, and great encouragement along the way is found in at least four indicators of progress: an unchurched person will come to trust a Christian, develop a curiosity about Jesus and the faith, become open to personal change, and get intentional about seeking answers to deep-seated questions.

If trust can be established, then the goal for missional teaching is agreed upon, not put upon. The value placed on authenticity especially by postmoderns requires that there be no manipulation or hidden agenda. There is no competition, but there is an agreement

to be honest and forthright, to be respectful, and to listen well. Then one simply engages, relates, talks, laughs, cries, walks, and lives an honest, truth-seeking life, and leaves the results of the missional encounter up to God.

Summary and Transition

In Part Two, the biblical foundation of Part One was brought forward and applied to the Church's calling in the twenty-first century. Chapter 3 acknowledged that certain features of modern life pose significant obstacles to Christian teaching. Nevertheless, there also exist many opportunities for bridge building between believers and the unchurched, and some of these opportunities are evident in a particularly religious-resistant region, the San Francisco Bay Area. Evidence was presented to challenge churches and missional communities that the traditional way of conducting Christian education has come up short in the last few decades, and some other model must be found that will enable teaching in the missional setting. Chapter 4 addressed the resistance to missional teaching latent in Christian teachers themselves, as well as the more obvious hurdles the unchurched, de-churched, and spiritually allergic must conquer in order to enter into informative conversation with Christians. Chapter 5 proposed, however, that missional teaching can bridge the gap between church and unchurched if certain conditions are met.

The concerns of the emerging Church and postmodern thinking with regard to missional teaching can be addressed by attention to teaching style and method. However, all Christ's ministers must be aware that people still resist the gospel for reasons beyond teaching style. These reasons do not preclude an ongoing effort to foster trust, open

channels of communication, and move intentionally in the direction of seeking answers to life's big questions. To the degree Christian disciples can understand the heart-cries of the lost and grasp the true gospel narrative, they can create a bridge that will connect the two by their missional teaching.

Part Three gets more concrete in answer to the question, "What would teaching in the missional setting look like?" Chapter 6 examines several biblical models for teaching and scrutinizes their missional potential through the lenses of three educational theorists. Out of these insights, a specific proposal for equipping future missional teachers (Fuller Seminary students) will recommend three methods usable in community third places such as Starbucks.

PART THREE

METHOD

CHAPTER 6

THE MANY WAYS TO TEACH

The case has been made from the Scriptures that disciples of Jesus Christ are commissioned to make new disciples by means of teaching. Despite the advances of technology and the deterioration of common knowledge about our Lord in American society, Christian teaching is still mandated. None of the social trends or challenges to the faith—postmodernism, secularism, relativism, consumerism, multiculturalism, or any other feature of American life today—can negate Jesus’ wise command to teach potential disciples. After considering both the challenges and opportunities ahead, the next step for anyone sensing the call to missional teaching is to consider possible methods.

The Old Method in Its Proper Setting

Opting for a new creative approach to teaching the uninitiated about Jesus Christ does not denigrate traditional church-based methods. The traditional lecture method of teaching is not without precedent in Scripture, and for that reason the method is durable, especially within the church culture. Two examples of its use will provide a basis of comparison with new models.

In Nehemiah 8 the Law is re-taught after the exiles returned to Jerusalem. Ezra read the Law to the Israelites: he opened the book, the people responded in worship, the Levites instructed the people as to Scripture's meaning, and the people adapted their lives to conform to it. The leaders—in a setting as close to a classroom as is apparent in Scripture—taught the content of the Law to the people so that once again it would define community life (Neh 8:1-8).

Jesus taught on the shore of Galilee, on a hillside, and on the plains of Israel, explaining to crowds of people the meaning and application of God's law and the arrival of the Kingdom of God. By doing so, he was helping them rethink their worldviews, religious assumptions, and their life goals. The authority with which he spoke was as astounding as the content, drawing people to listen more intently and come closer out of curiosity. Listening and curiosity are very good outcomes of any kind of teaching, but even Jesus sought a particular learning indicator: belief in him expressed in God-centered action. When his teaching sifted down to the individual level, he taught toward this goal.

With Jesus' example in mind, then, a reality check among contemporary Christ-followers is required, as the methods used in traditional, classroom-based instruction are unlikely to be effective in the missional setting. What characterizes the traditional method, in the extreme, is its reliance upon the expert lecturer before a non-interactive audience. At its mildest, traditional Christian education requires participants to come where it is offered, the church itself, precisely the scenario the religiously allergic try to avoid. In Chapter 4, reasons were given for the perceived reticence of the unchurched, de-churched, and religiously allergic to accept traditional teaching from Christian

disciples. Some of the reasons can be attributed to generational differences,¹ others to the wide range of learning styles that are more fully appreciated in educational circles today.² Whatever the reasons, the situation brings bad news and good news to those who desire to teach in the missional setting. The bad news is that they will be required to let go of “the way we have always done it.” The good news is that there are several innovative and biblically endorsed methods available for bridging the gap to the lost, in the environment where they feel comfortable.

Biblical Examples of Non-Classroom Models of Teaching

The Scriptures also illustrate non-traditional teaching methods that are better suited to the missional setting. The diversity of options alone gives missional leaders significant leeway in determining possibilities for the present challenge in their particular settings. Many biblical examples show assorted methods for conveying information, reviewing God’s story, explaining meaning, and addressing questions.

Ceremony as Remembrance

The quintessential example of ceremony as teaching opportunity is the annual Passover observance. This ritual recounts the defining event in the life of Israel, which occurred on the night of the tenth plague of Egypt, and includes the children’s ceremonial question, “What do you mean by this observance?” Parents teach the children by answering this way: “It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the

¹ Gary L. McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 21-23.

² Barbara Bruce, *7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Adults: Using Our Multiple Intelligences to Build Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 19-20.

houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses” (Ex 12:1-28).

The New Testament equivalent of teaching through ceremony was instituted by Christ as the sacrament of communion. The day before his death, for the benefit of his disciples, Jesus attached new meaning into the instructional framework of Passover. He taught them that his was the blood of the new covenant (Mt 26:28) and that his body would be given for them. They were to repeat this sacred meal in his memory, in order to reinforce a central belief: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26).

In the missional setting, teaching by ceremony can be rendered in the adoption of meaningful ritual, even as simple as a prayer before lifting lattes to the lips. A youth group led by their pastor Mark Senter once enacted Communion at a winter fellowship event, by distributing the elements of Coke and Doritos at the snack shack to fifty teenage ice skaters.³ The teaching point was contextualized to the early 1980s but unmistakable: Jesus told his disciples his death would accomplish the forgiveness of sins, and every time they partake of the basic food of life they would remember this.

Apprentice Model

Beautifully described in Deuteronomy 4 and 6, the apprentice model was a lifestyle-shaping way to instruct. Fathers were to “walk the talk” with their children, surrounding them with input from the Scriptures and talking about it at key points in the day (Dt 6:6-9). Jesus used this method with his closest disciples, for instance, on a

³ Mark Senter, III, professor of educational ministries at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, in an email to author, April 28, 2011.

Sabbath as they walked through a wheat field gleaning some grain for lunch and later as Jesus healed the man with the withered hand in the synagogue (Mt 12:1-13).⁴ For Jesus, any occasion could offer an illustration of God's Kingdom. The apprentice learns by watching the Master and processing those observations until lessons are internalized and new habits are developed.

Experiential Learning

Learning through experience is powerful and effective, especially if people take time after an experience to reflect upon it and draw conclusions. God taught Israel that he is a reliable provider by requiring them to trust him for their bread every day:

Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, *in order to make you understand* that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Dt 8:2-3, emphasis added)

Elijah's extended encounter with the widow of Zarephath in the region of Sidon (1 Kgs 17:8-24) was an exercise of mutual experiential learning, as she provided him grain and oil, and he raised her only son from the dead. Elijah, the believer, received God's provision under miraculous conditions, the Sidonian widow received the grace of God in a perpetual food supply, and her son received new life, literally. From this they demonstrated to each other that God is good and cares for each person.

⁴ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 271-310. Willard describes Christian discipleship as "apprenticing ourselves to Jesus in Kingdom living" (273). A plan for being a student of Jesus is offered in Chapter 8, "On Being a Disciple, or Student, of Jesus."

The Philistines, pagan and defiant of God, spiritually hard-to-get, also learned by experience the superior power of God. When they captured the Ark of the Covenant and placed it in the temple of their deity Dagon, something strange happened overnight:

When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. But when they rose early on the next morning, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off upon the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. (1 Sm 5:3-4)

These repeated humiliations of Dagon would be merely amusing, except that immediately afterward, they experienced firsthand the judgment of God and learned that God was extremely powerful.

Storytelling as Truth-telling

On an individual basis, storytelling became an effective teaching tool in the life of David after his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. The prophet Nathan made a house call (2 Sm 12) and confronted David with a story of a rich man stealing his poor neighbor's lamb. Upon David's outrage at the injustice of it, Nathan said, "You are the man!" David comprehended the calamity he had perpetrated, repented, and suffered the consequences.

Storytelling was one of Jesus' favorite teaching methods, as evidenced by the numerous parables in the gospels. By describing the Kingdom of heaven in terms of fishing, for instance, Jesus brought the disciples' world into his own in order to reveal God's purposes (Mt 13:47-49). The Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:1-23) was a comfort to the peasants, but an iron fist in a velvet glove to the Pharisees. Both were taught the truth

about receiving the Word of God. To the peasants it was liberating truth, to the Pharisees, a convicting truth, but to both audiences truth was conveyed through story.

Teaching through Incarnational Example

The prophet Hosea was called to deliver God's message to Israel by means of the unusual circumstances of his own life. God commanded him to marry adulterous Gomer to illustrate God's judgment that Israel had gone after other gods in spiritual adultery against the Lord. Hosea and Gomer had three children, each given a name symbolic of the spiritual condition of the people. Hosea remained a faithful husband and loving father despite the public humiliation of Gomer's behavior. In this sense, Hosea did not merely deliver a message; he *was* the message.

In a similar but more positive vein, Jeremiah exhorted the exiled, shell-shocked Jews in Babylon to live as God's people. They were encouraged to make their home in the foreign land, plant vineyards, raise children, live in community, and contribute to the prosperity of the city (Jer 29:4-9). They were to maintain spiritual vigilance by continually listening to the word of God (v. 19f). Thus strengthened, they could give witness to the promises of God and embrace their identity even as they longed for Jerusalem (Ps 137:1-6).

Later during the Exile, Daniel gives a fine example of the fearless and expedient adaptation to a foreign culture, while maintaining a life centered on the Living God. He and three Jewish companions differentiate themselves from the surrounding culture by diet and prayer. Their intelligence and skills endeared them to the king, but their primary allegiance to God finally got them into trouble. God delivered them, and Daniel was

vindicated and honored in Babylon. His prominent government position allowed him to conduct a prophetic ministry both to the Babylonian king and to the Jews in exile.

The essence of teaching by incarnational example was provided by Jesus, who, by means of the Incarnation, also embedded himself in a culture, time, place, language, and people where he could communicate his message and live a distinct life that pointed the way to God. His life was characterized by moral perfection, but this did not put him out of touch with ordinary people. He proved that the effort to acculturate provides the opportunity for informative conversation and “proclamation by lifestyle.”

These examples of various teaching methods in the Bible demonstrate that God is invested in more than one particular technique for making his Word and will known. Not all of these methods may be feasible in an everyday twenty-first-century setting, but the average missional teacher could easily be at home with methods like apprenticeships, shared experiences, ancient practices, and storytelling, which will be expanded for contemporary settings in the next chapter.

Contemporary Theorists in Support of Alternative Learning Methods

There are significant links between the diverse biblical models above and contemporary modes of communication and learning. Contemporary educational theorists confirm that there are effective alternatives to the traditional instructional model. In fact, in many cases, recent innovations in educational practice have proven to be superior. The disciplines of educational psychology and learning theory have also contributed methods for testing student progress and effective teaching, to provide proof that new practices actually produce measurable results. Three general theories have enjoyed wide

application in the last forty years, and have been selected for this paper for their resonance with the biblical models observed above: experiential learning, dialogue learning, and subject-centered learning.

David Kolb—Experiential Learning

The ongoing process of spiritual formation is described aptly, if unintentionally, by the educational theorist David A. Kolb in *Experiential Learning*: “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.

Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it.”⁵

Kolb supports this definition of learning by six general propositions of experiential learning theory, which, explain Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner in their book,

Learning in Adulthood, Kolb gleaned from the works of psychologists and educators

(including Piaget, Jung, and Rogers).⁶ The six general propositions are:

1. Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
2. Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience. Learning is relearning.
3. Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world. Learning is by its very nature full of tension.
4. Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
5. Learning involves transactions between the person and the environment.
6. Learning is constructivist in nature, that is, learning creates knowledge that is the result of transactions between social knowledge and personal knowledge.⁷

⁵ David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984), 41.

⁶ Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood*, 163.

⁷ Alice Y. Kolb and David A. Kolb, “Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education,” *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 4, no. 2 (June 2005): 193-212.

An individual who has embarked upon the journey of spiritual formation is acutely aware that something has begun, and its goal is perfection (2 Cor 13:9); but perfection may not be achieved in this life: Paul writes, “The one who began a good work in you all will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). Learning is most certainly a process. It is not possible for the learning process to occur outside the realm of personal experience, because learning involves personal change and adaptation to truth as it unfolds in life’s happenings. Change of one’s mind, feelings, or actions occurs when the previously held thought, emotion, or habit is proven to be inadequate or wrong. The process of discovery that leads to this conclusion is at once confrontational and necessary and requires the learner to be willing to let go of a preconceived notion. When one is able to resolve the tension with adoption of a new way of thinking, the effect is life-changing. A cognitive shift can result in emotional release, redirection of a life’s work, social reorientation, and any number of other life-sized holistic effects. The process, especially when guided by a fellow-explorer (like a missional teacher), interprets to the learner the meaning of one’s environment from a Christian point of view or what is happening within it. In the end, acquisition of new knowledge is the result of putting all the pieces of life together into a new whole.

Kolb describes this process of learning in terms of a cycle, using the Lewinian Experiential Learning Model, as illustrated by figure 8. One may enter the learning circle at any point. As an example, starting at the top, imagine an elderly individual who experiences a car accident resulting in physical injury. While in recovery at the hospital, the driver recalls what happened and reflects on factors that might have contributed to it. The combination of age, slowed reflexes, and confusion conspired to blind the driver to

the red light. Jarred by this experience, the patient is reminded of core values, perhaps coming from a comprehensive worldview, that lead to more abstract reflection. Those values might include submission to fate (“what will happen will happen”), countered with unwillingness to be dangerous to one’s neighbor, the value of human life (one’s own and others’), the nature of community, or the desire to live in health and independence. The idea begins to percolate that a proper response to the accident is either to relinquish his driver’s license or restrict driving to daylight hours in good weather. In the hopes of keeping as much independence as possible, the elderly person agrees to limits. He will take the drivers’ refresher course at the DMV, solicit rides for longer travel, and (based on observations resulting from the accident) reduce the risk factors in routine daytime driving. This experimentation with options, operating within the driver’s value system, helps the individual learn from experience and adjust future experiences to the new reality within.

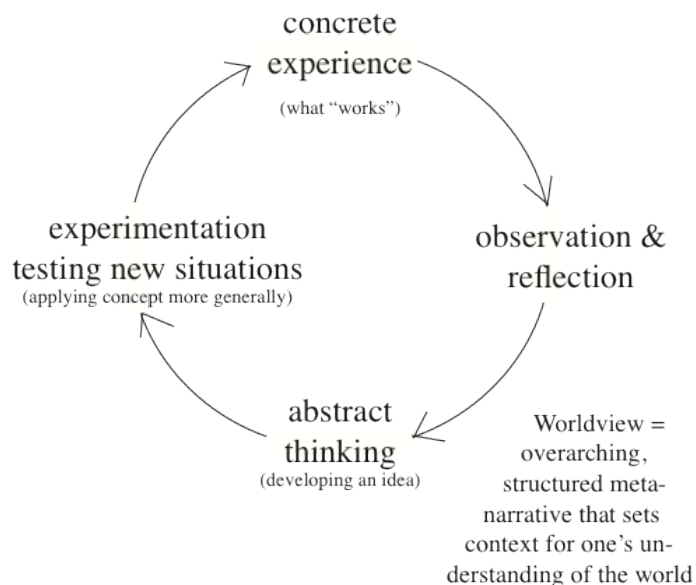


Figure 8. The Learning Cycle. Source: Adapted from David A. Kolb, *The Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 21.

The learning cycle, guided by a fellow traveler on the faith journey, is one version of what has been called informative conversation in the missional setting. The research of Everts and Schaupp shows that as trust is established, perhaps through realization that significant experiences are shared, the unchurched, de-churched, or religiously allergic person opens to the possibility of change. If this openness can translate into a move from complacency to curiosity about Jesus, then hope is alive that this person can graduate from meandering around the question to actually seeking answers about God.⁸ Each step along the way represents something the unchurched person needs to experience as safe and rewarding, even before one introduces any content about Jesus or the gospel. If the initial experiences turn out to be helpful, the missional teacher has earned the right to accompany the lost on subsequent tours around the learning circle. This effort is facilitated by proximity in everyday life and patience as circumstances unfold.

Jane Vella—Dialogue Learning

For twenty-seven years, Jane Vella was a Maryknoll Sister who taught in East Africa, southern Africa, Latin America, Asia, and in rural America. She left the order in 1977 and pursued a PhD in adult education at the University of Massachusetts. Upon completion of her degree, she founded what is now known as Global Learning Partners and until her retirement in 2000 developed a series of educational training courses that are used worldwide.⁹ Her approach, known as “dialogue learning,” has been tested and successfully implemented across diverse cultures, demonstrating its simplicity as well as

⁸ Everts and Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost*, 23-24.

⁹ “Jane Vella,” Global Learning Partners website, <http://www.globalearning.com/janevella/profile.htm> (accessed April 1, 2011).

its usefulness. Affirming the values and the needs of a religiously resistant sub-culture and how they might interact with the Christian faith, dialogue learning is based on twelve interlocking principles:

1. *Needs assessment*: participation of the learners in naming what is to be learned
2. *Safety* in the environment and the process
3. *Sound relationship* between teacher and learner and among learners
4. *Sequence* of content and *reinforcement*
5. *Praxis*: action with reflection or learning by doing
6. *Respect* for learners as decision makers
7. *Ideas, feelings, and actions*: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of learning
8. *Immediacy* of the learning
9. *Clear roles and role development*
10. *Teamwork* and use of small groups
11. *Engagement* of the learners in what they are learning
12. *Accountability*: how do they know they know?¹⁰

Each of these principles has direct application to teaching in the missional setting.

The first principle is Needs Assessment. The missional teacher appreciates the fact that every person comes with a unique set of experiences and expectations. The task of the bridge-builder is to discover what those are and pave a way to meet them. In the spirit of the patient Christ, the missional teacher allows the potential learner to name the question and the need for further information or experience in order to answer it. This requires a considerable effort at listening and dialogue, as well as building trust, which leads to the second principle.¹¹

The second principle is Safety. Just as Evert and Schaupp identify “trusting a Christian” as the first threshold an unchurched person needs to cross, Vella recognizes

¹⁰ Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5-8.

that learning occurs in an environment in which safety is assured.¹² This safety is based on several factors: trust in the competence and authenticity of the teacher, belief that the goals are realistic, the quality of small group interaction, trust in the sequence of learning activities, and a nonjudgmental attitude on the part of the teacher and fellow learners.¹³

Vella's third principle is Sound Relationships. Learning is enhanced when the teacher and learner relate to each other with respect, humility, authenticity, and open communication. Good listening is one of the best indicators that a learning relationship is on solid footing. This principle resonates with the high value that postmoderns, for instance, place on authenticity.

Fourth is Sequencing and Reinforcement. Effective teaching of adults utilizes some logic in the introduction of ideas or activities: "Sequence means the programming of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in an order that goes from simple to complex and from group-supported to solo efforts."¹⁴ This sequence relies on insight into the material itself and the capacity of the student to learn it. The guide of this learning process must discern the size of a chewable bite of information, and organize the material into units that can be apprehended and reinforced with additional activities or practice. Missional teachers will be ready for the questions an individual brings to the conversation if they organize the content into a framework—but not a script—that they can unfold to the learner. "God's Story in Five Acts" is one such framework, and for each individual in the missional setting, its unfolding is custom-made in a sequence that makes sense. When a learner

¹² Everts and Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost*, 23.

¹³ Vella, *Learning to Listen*, 8-10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

feels that mastery has been achieved because steps along the way have been reinforced, then the result is motivation for further learning.¹⁵

Vella's fifth principle is Praxis. Any learning activity a missional teacher can offer is strengthened when opportunity is given to reflect on the experience, evaluate the outcome, and purpose to apply it in everyday life. This principle points to the shift in emphasis from information to transformation, and is completely consistent with the overall learning goal in missional teaching, to make a disciple.

The sixth principle is Respect. The key component in this principle is the idea that adult learners are not to be treated as objects but as subjects of the learning. Given as many opportunities for choice as possible, an adult becomes an active agent in his or her own learning path. A good missional teacher guides the options from which the learners can choose, but otherwise is open to an agenda that is customized to individuals. As a result, learners have a vested interest in the process because they had a hand in shaping it. The missional teacher might offer options like this: "Given your [interest in this subject] [question about _____], there are a couple of ways we could explore the topic: [Option 1] or [Option 2]. Which do you think would be the most helpful to you?"

The seventh principle is Ideas, Feelings, and Actions. Since the goal of missional teaching is nothing short of life transformation (becoming like Christ in discipleship), it is important to understand that people are thinking, feeling, and doing beings.¹⁶ Effective learning takes place when these three aspects are fully engaged in the learning agenda.

¹⁵ Vella, *Learning to Listen*, 12-14.

¹⁶ These categories of know, feel, and do are ubiquitous in educational literature. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 30-39, identifies six aspects of a human life in need of renovation: thought, feeling, choice, body, social context, and soul. A holistic approach to teaching faith as a way of life will touch all of these, but methods for doing so are generally categorized as cognitive, affective, or behavioral.

From a missional point of view, it makes sense that these three would be linked: the ideas one discovers and the knowledge one gains elicit feelings and responses, which lead to action. If faith is ever to become a way of life for people, informative conversation must motivate them to well-informed action.

Vella's eighth principle is Immediacy. The challenge for the missional teacher is to know the learner well enough to be able to guide a lesson that is immediately useful to the learner. This is why the gospel that only promises heaven when one dies is inadequate motivation for learning anything about God, especially for the uninitiated. A completely legitimate question to probe at any time is, "How is this information useful in your life today?" or "How might this knowledge change the way you and I live?" One can point toward life's end simultaneously, but immediacy is of high value for the unchurched.

The ninth is Clear Roles and Role Development. Vella was concerned about how the learners perceived her and whether being called "Dr. Vella" or "Jane" made a difference in her accessibility or the openness of a learning group to dialogue.¹⁷ In the missional setting, the Christian disciple and the unchurched tend to do better assigning roles as co-learners or friends if relatively young. Older folks may put more stock in credentials, so "Dr. Vella" might be necessary; nevertheless, the unchurched of any age respond to the respect and authenticity fostered by the role of fellow traveler on a learning adventure.

The tenth principle is Teamwork. Working together, giving voice to every participant, and sharing insights while (gently) testing ignorance with further learning opportunities, a group of unchurched, de-churched, and spiritually allergic people can

¹⁷ Vella, *Learning to Listen*, 21.

make great progress. *The Alpha Course* is designed to facilitate this happening. When a resistant person has an “aha moment” because a peer instead of an expert shared insight, teamwork is realized.

The eleventh principle is Engagement. Otherwise known as active learning, this principle is based on the understanding that people desire to be empowered, not just informed, for real life. To the extent that their education fosters passivity, people are ill-prepared to live life any differently. Informative conversation in the missional setting is the ideal context in which to foster active engagement in learning tasks. Dialogue gives immediate feedback; learners are encouraged to initiate inquiry; and one never knows exactly how active learning will turn out, which adds a motivating suspense to both teacher and learner.

Vella’s twelfth and final principle is Accountability. Vella is referring to mutual accountability, not the one-way evaluation of a student by the teacher at the end of a teaching unit. In the missional setting, Christian disciples earn the right to participate in informative conversation, so submitting to accountability is essential. While refraining from saying what their “itching ears” want to hear (2 Tm 4:3), that is, compromising on doctrine or the message of God’s Story, the believer remains humble about method and respectful of persons in dialogue. Checking in periodically, applying the lesson to one’s own life, and reflecting on group progress are all ways to honor accountability between participants. Vella’s twelve principles for dialogue learning enliven the imagination of the missional teacher by expressing the interdependence of the participants in informative conversation.

Parker Palmer—Subject-centered Learning

Parker Palmer, who earned a PhD in sociology from University of California, Berkeley in 1970, developed a reputation as a master teacher and explorer of the spiritual and communal nature of education. Of Quaker Christian roots, Palmer has seen his influence reach across all religious barriers using concepts accessible to all. This is one of the reasons why his approach is eminently applicable to the missional setting, where pluralism and diversity are the starting points for many. Palmer defines the primary role of the teacher: “To teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced.”¹⁸ Two of Palmer’s books, *To Know as We Are Known* (1993) and *The Courage to Teach* (2007), provide the basis for the following reflection on teaching in the missional setting.

“Creating a space” is consistent with Vella’s principle of safety. The creation of a learning space, according to Palmer, is the establishment of a fearless learning environment. A teacher who is authentic and secure welcomes students to form a learning community, gives them a voice, invites them to interact with the subject, and fosters relationship between learners, teacher, and subject based on a common need to know and be known. Palmer describes the teacher’s vital role in this space: “The teacher is a mediator between the knower and the known, between the learner and the subject to be learned. A teacher, not some theory, is the living link in the epistemological chain.”¹⁹ In this position, the task is to teach “a mode of relationship between the knower [student]

¹⁸ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 92.

¹⁹ Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983), 29.

and the known [subject], a way of being in the world.”²⁰ This way of being in the world is characterized by curiosity, love for what is known, and mutual accountability in the quest to gain knowledge: “To know in truth is to become betrothed, to engage the known with one’s whole self, an engagement one enters with attentiveness, care, and good will.”²¹ The effort at learning not only binds people to the subject, but to each other.

Palmer considers learning an exercise of the “community of truth” and claims that “reality is a web of communal relationships, and we can know reality only by being in community with it.”²² Parker derives this basic concept from quantum physics, as do Vella and Margaret Wheatley,²³ which sees reality and its truth as a vast web of relationships in which teachers and learners find their places, in order to be known as part of that reality even as they discover its truth between them. With this concept in mind, Christian disciples, commissioned to teach in the missional setting, embed within and become a part of the relational web seeking after truth. God is already present and at work, perhaps invisibly, to make himself known in the neighborhood. The missionary mediates God’s self-revelation within the interdependent relationships already in place.

The community that forms around truth is essential for the subject (Christ) to become known: “If we want a community of truth in the classroom, a community that can keep us honest, we must put a *third thing*, a great thing, at the center of the pedagogical circle. . . . Perhaps the classroom should be neither teacher-centered nor student-centered

²⁰ Palmer, *To Know*, 30.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²² Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 97.

²³ Vella, *Learning to Listen*, 30-35; and Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006), 61-73.

but subject-centered.”²⁴ That Subject, it turns out, wants to know the learner and challenges the learning community to draw closer, not just to speculate, but to embrace it and be transformed by it. Truth, especially Christian truth, then, cannot be held at arm’s length to be examined propositionally or only scientifically, but learners (the knowers) must relate to the truth (the known) and become interdependent with it.

In the missional setting, the subject of every teaching/learning opportunity is, in one way or another, visibly or invisibly, God’s truth. God bids the curious to “come and see,” just as Jesus invited two future disciples to enter into his world in order to get to know him (Jn 1:35-42). The Lord wants to be known as he has revealed himself to humanity, not as people have conjured up an image. C.S. Lewis captured this idea of objectivity in Letter 4 of *The Screwtape Letters*, “The Painful Subject of Prayer.” Screwtape instructs the junior devil Wormwood to divert the human’s prayers away from the real God: “For if [the human] ever comes to make the distinction, if ever he consciously directs his prayers ‘not to what I think thou art but *to what you knowest thyself to be,*’ our situation is, for the moment, desperate.”²⁵ In the missional setting, informative conversation is designed to help the participants cast aside preconceived notions of God and make an honest attempt to see reality beyond one’s self-definitions. This is extraordinarily difficult, but necessary and possible if a relationship of trust can be established.

Palmer identifies a problem with one facet of postmodernism, which tries to liberate the world of objectivism in favor of “my truth,” as discussed in Chapter 4:

²⁴ Palmer, *Courage to Teach*, 119.

²⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 18-19, emphasis added.

If my private perceptions are the measure of truth, if my truth cannot be challenged or enlarged by the perceptions of another, I have merely found one more way to objectify and hold the other at arm's length, to avoid again the challenge of personal transformation. This view isolates the self, creates as many worlds as there are knowers, destroys the possibility of community, and finally makes the other an object of no real account.²⁶

In the missional setting, the teaching hurdle involves recognizing the dogmatism of both certainty and open-mindedness, and submitting one's perception of the truth to the group where the other participants can also submit their own perceptions of the truth to scrutiny. The mediator of the inevitable conflicts is the truth between us: Palmer writes, "By Christian understanding, truth is neither 'out there' nor 'in here,' but both. Truth is between us, in relationship, to be found in the dialogue of knowers and knowns who are understood as independent but accountable selves. This dialogue saves personal truth from subjectivism" and it saves the informative conversation from becoming two people talking past each other.²⁷

The safe learning environment where "the community of truth is practiced" reaches to experience God's truth at the center of life. One of the goals of missional teaching is demonstrating and proclaiming Christian faith as a way of life, rather than an invitation to church activities. A way of life is practiced and enjoyed; it assumes that habits have been adopted, rhythms have been established, and questions have been addressed to sustain this life. When a community sponsors a Civil War battle reenactment or Marin County stages its Renaissance Faire, a community seeks to embody a different way of life temporarily, for the fun or the education it provides. St. Patrick and his

²⁶ Palmer, *To Know*, 55.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

evangelistic bands invited the Celts to join in their Christian missional outposts, to belong before believing, in order to try the faith on for size within a community of truth. If, in practice, it rings true over time, then its truth is adopted permanently as the new reality.

Palmer observes that the modernist relies too heavily on objectivity to validate knowledge. For example, Stanford University's religious studies department in the early 1970s assigned Jewish doctoral students as teaching assistants for Christian theology classes, because, it was said, they could be more objective graders, without any vested interest in the outcome. However, this is exactly opposite Palmer's concept of practicing the community of truth. One learns best by putting oneself into the picture, playing a part in the drama, and welcoming (or even, perhaps rejecting) the impact on one's life. Palmer offers an example:

The Greeks regarded drama as integral to life, not a spectator sport but a soul-making force. But we, unlike the Greeks, make a rigid distinction between the observer and the observed for the sake of objectivity. Where Greek audiences were able to put themselves at the center of the play—literally allowing it to “play” upon them—we hold ourselves apart for fear of distorting the objective facts with our subjective needs.²⁸

A missional teacher's goal is to help students become “Greeks,” to understand themselves as an integral part of the action in “God's Play in Five Acts.” When teachers in dialogue with the unchurched can help them “put themselves at the center of the play—literally allowing it to ‘play’ upon them,” they are ushering the uninitiated into God's Story, and inviting God to work the truth into their perceptions and then their experience. Brokenness, confusion, and prejudices all find their places in that story, and

²⁸ Palmer, *To Know*, 23.

the missional teacher has the privilege of helping the learner discover what Christ can do with them.

CHAPTER 7

SUGGESTED MODELS FOR USE AT THIRD PLACES

The backdrop of the “Greek play” at the end of Chapter 6 has been set. The stage upon which “God’s Play in Five Acts” is enacted is found in those informal, neighborhood settings where conversation can take place without too much distraction: the Starbucks around the corner that has table seating in a shaded outdoor garden; the fitness gym that arranges treadmill machines in a circle to facilitate face-to-face talking instead of television viewing; the overnight sidewalk campout on Colorado Boulevard in anticipation of the Rose Bowl Parade; a hiking trail winding through the city’s Open Space. These of course are only examples, and there are many more “third places” that can be possible stages for the unfolding of God’s Story; since the basic method of missional teaching is informative conversation, any place conducive to dialogue is a good option.

The players on this stage start with the nucleus, called a missional community. According to Alan Roxburgh, in the paradigm-shifting book *The Missional Church*, these are Christian disciples who sense a call as a small subset of the congregation to form a covenant community and go on a journey with Jesus into the world. Their context (or

stage, to use the current analogy) moves from the church building to a community meeting place where the Way of Christ can be lived, demonstrated to the curious, talked about in informative conversation, and recommended for those invited to join in.¹ This movement from congregation to missional community is like a spider plant that replicates itself by sprouting off-shoots (see figure 9). Those offshoots can plant themselves in another flowerpot or adjoining soil. The baby plants are microcosms of the main plant, with identical DNA. When they take root in a new place, they become self-sustaining spider plants able to function on their own. So the missional community, according to Alan Hirsch, arises from the natural inclination of the Church to form new pods by means of the Spirit's power and calling.² Their method does not include transplanting the new fellowship back into the old congregation, but repeating the reproductive cycle and spawning new missional communities ever outward. Their primary focus is not evangelism, however, but living as a community under the Kingdom of God: Guder explains, "The reign of God in Christ, the social reality of the redeemed community, determines the church's direction."³

¹ Alan J. Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership: Equipping God's People for Mission" in Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 207-13.

² Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 18 and 78.

³ Guder, *Missional Church*, 204.



Figure 9. Spider Plant as Model for Missional Communities.

Once they establish a stage for the Story, the missional community, the Church in microcosm, looks for direction by asking the question, “Where is the script?” By now, the reader must have guessed that there is no script for missional teaching, which J. P. Moreland and Tim Muehlhoff suggest thrives on improvisation.⁴ Wright, however, considers it more like jazz improvisation: a jazz combo sets a few rules before beginning and agrees upon key, meter, an opening motif, and an ending. Within these parameters, the musicians play from the heart, reading each other’s signals, conducting musical dialogue, reaching a high point, and closing in a satisfying resolution.⁵ So it is with informative conversation that shapes the drama of spiritual transformation over time. Leighton Ford, in promoting narrative evangelism, claims that “the Holy Spirit . . .

⁴ J. P. Moreland and Tim Muehlhoff, *The God Conversation: Using Stories and Illustrations to Explain Your Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 12.

⁵ Wright, “A Church Shaped for Mission” (lectures, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, February 24 and 26, 2009). Wright also described improvisation as required in a dramatic play, whose final act is lost, in *The New Testament and the People of God*, 140.

deprograms evangelism” and turns the missional endeavor into something living, dynamic, and transforming “by writing [God’s] Story on our lives.”⁶

Overarching Learning Objectives for Missional Teaching

Particular improvisational outlines are presented here as three different models for missional teaching. What they have in common is the establishment of trust, dialogue, grace, acute listening skills, informality, authenticity, and patience. Their particular features focus on the various purposes that are drawn up by the participants. If the goal is learning Christlikeness, the best method might be apprenticeship. If the goal is doctrinal clarification, one good method is storytelling. If the goal is belonging in community in order to deal with life as it unfolds, the method approximates the wilderness adventure. Over all these methods, however, a few general learning objectives apply to help the missional teacher stay on track, keep expectations in clear view, and evaluate progress in each unique process of informative conversation. As a result of informative conversation between the missional teacher and the unchurched, de-churched, or religiously allergic in missional community, the learners over time will: 1) know enough about God to make an intelligent decision about believing, 2) feel God’s love in relationship with the missional community, and 3) take action to grow emotionally and spiritually.

“Knowing” Goals—Cognitive

Over time, not-yet-Christian learners should know and understand: 1) God is, God loves, God reigns, God grieves, God reconciles, and God hopes, by becoming acquainted

⁶ Leighton Ford, *The Power of Story: Rediscovering the Oldest, Most Natural Way to Reach People for Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1994), 164.

with the essential elements of “God’s Story in Five Acts” as seen in figure 10; 2) the essential elements of their own faith and the difference(s) between their current beliefs and the essential tenets of the Christian faith; 3) the link between their heart-cries and God’s Story and the answer of those cries within God’s mercy and grace in Jesus Christ (Ps 141:8; 2 Cor 12:9); 4) their role in “God’s Story in Five Acts,” as players/participants in God’s drama, rather than the limited perception of God playing a role in their lives;⁷ 5) the nature of faith as the sum of knowing what is true, assenting to it, and trusting God; and that faith is possible even today;⁸ 6) it is possible to connect with God personally and to have a relationship with him that is redemptive, purposeful, and hopeful (Rm 8:14-17); and 7) the “good life” is possible only in alignment with God’s purposes and participation in those purposes in and for the world (Mt 6:33). Verification that these goals have been met will become clear in the course of informative conversation, in the learners’ ability to articulate their thoughts, to explain the significant life events with God in the picture, to analyze and synthesize parts of God’s Story, and to decide what is reasonable, acceptable, and actionable.

⁷ Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 34. Thielicke critiques “all the movements which find their point of departure in the I as the subject of experience and understanding” as Cartesian theology, after René Descartes. The position of the evangelical believer is to “integrate his existence into God’s Word (not *vice versa*)” (153-54).

⁸ Calvin, *ICR*, III.2.33:581.

Act in God’s Story	Topics for Exploration	God’s Action or Response
Act 1 Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God’s existence, nature, and imminence • God’s imprint and intention for all creation • God’s design for humanity 	God is. God loves. God reigns.
Act 2 Fall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • distrust of God leading to pride and disobedience • resulting alienation, which is experienced as separation from God, alienation from each other, struggle with the earth, inner fragmentation 	God grieves.
Act 3 Covenant/Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God’s covenant to relate to humanity, first to Israel and now to you • Jesus’ identity (Son of God) and his purposeful life (fully human), ministry, death, and resurrection “for all people and for you” 	God reconciles.
Act 4 Jesus		
Act 5 The Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the original purpose for the church’s existence (to know Christ and to make him known) • the Holy Spirit’s abiding and powerful presence for those who believe; and • Christ’s return to usher in the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21) 	God hopes. God reigns.

Figure 10. Basic Knowledge of God Derived from God’s Story in Five Acts.

“Feeling” Goals—Affective

Overall, the goal is to involve the soul, the core of a person’s being, in the process of discovering God’s presence in his or her life. Over time the learner will feel: 1) able to trust a Christian (overcome fear, hostility, or avoidance);⁹ 2) loved, respected, and welcomed into relationship by a missional community; 3) willing to exchange

⁹ Everts and Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost*, 29-48.

complacency for curiosity about God;¹⁰ 4) in touch with his/her true pain, longing, lack of purpose, ignorance, and so on; 5) joyful and empowered by the Holy Spirit to face life with purpose; and 6) moved by the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Spirit to have a positive influence on others.¹¹

Learning indicators in the domain of feelings are more difficult to discern. Some are visible: the learners come back for a second (or subsequent) meeting, relax in the informative conversation, reflect beyond the abstract to the affective, and show ability to listen and empathize with others in the missional community. The best way to find out how conversation partners are doing at the feeling level is to ask.

The starting point for establishment of trust may not be “zero.” If a person has experienced God as untrustworthy (for example, asking, “Where was God when I was raped at age twelve?”), then the missional conversation is starting at “minus three.” The emotional goal becomes relinquishing emotional-laden stereotypes and becoming willing to rebuild trust. A missional community incorporating the concepts of Chapter 6 into its lifestyle can create the safe environment necessary for this to happen.

“Doing” Goal—Behavioral

Specific goals for action vary according to the personality and situation of the learners, as well as according to the type of learning activity the missional community is pursuing. Behavioral learning goals, therefore, will be set forth within the discussion of the three methods to follow. In general, the missional teacher seeks to create the environment in which the learner can decide the course of his or her spiritual

¹⁰ Everts and Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost*, 49-65.

¹¹ Ford, *The Power of Story*, 13-14.

development through a process of intellectual integrity and emotional maturing. The goals are to apply intentionality to the inquiry and then to act on one's belief, whatever that turns out to be, but especially after experimenting with Christian faith as a way of life. The proof that a life is actually undergoing transformation includes a new social identity and sense of belonging with the missional community, adoption of an authentic vocabulary to describe spiritual movement (words genuine to the person, not a parrot),¹² behavior more consistent with Christlikeness (the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the fruit of the Spirit being good places to start an assessment), and ultimately a shift from self-centeredness to God-centeredness.¹³ This process is fundamentally more than changing minds; it aims at no less than a transformed character.

Three Models for Missional Teaching

The overall goal of missional teaching is an unchurched person finally curious about a relationship with God and satisfied to a point of resolution. This process necessarily involves thinking, feeling, and doing, as outlined above. Because the desired impact is potentially life changing, and because every life is unique, having a repertoire of approaches from which to choose is prudent. The following three methods that address these goals in different ways are now offered.

Storytelling as Truth-telling

Storytelling as a teaching method was introduced in Chapter 6 and provides a good starting place for describing methods suitable to informal settings like Starbucks or

¹² Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 31-41.

¹³ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 321-22.

the gym. Stories naturally enliven conversation. Other relational challenges can be overcome if a conversation group can share a vivid narrative, as illustrated by the following true story.

Years ago, a corporate wife named Mary was the (initially) unwilling participant in an informative conversation.¹⁴ She and her husband walked into a ballroom of six hundred already-seated dinner guests at his company's Christmas party. Irritated at being late and knowing no one at the table they found, Mary turned to introduce herself to the gentleman on her left. The slight man with a very thick accent gave his unpronounceable name, and thoughts of an interminably long evening ahead caused an inner panic. (Imagine how an unchurched or religiously allergic diner might panic at the realization that a clergyperson has just joined the table.) Struggling with this closed mindset, Mary breathed a prayer for help, and settled in to converse with the foreign-looking man: "Your name does not roll off my tongue easily. What kind of name is it?" He replied, "It is Vietnamese. I am from Saigon, but I live in Fremont now and work as an engineer for the company." She asked how he came to live in the Bay Area. As his story unfolded, his accent to her ears melted away, and she was ushered into the world of Saigon in 1975. In 105-degree weather and an even hotter military calamity, this South Vietnamese helicopter pilot evacuated dozens of civilians to a U.S. Navy ship offshore on the day Saigon fell to the Communists. A church group in Fremont, California, sponsored him and his family and helped graft them into American society. He closed with the summary statement: "One cannot do the impossible without supportive friends."

¹⁴ Personal experience of the author at the Nellcor Christmas Party, December 3, 1988. The name of the Vietnamese immigrant is lost.

Later, reporting this encounter to her Bible study group, Mary was bowled over that God could overcome her bad mood, a thick foreign accent, and her perceived captivity to make the evening so memorable and instructive. Her experience demonstrates one prime reason for using stories with a potentially resistant audience: to pique and sustain interest in a topic the hearer would not necessarily choose. Stories humanize people, and great stories are vehicles to help the missional teacher move from abstract exposition to affective engagement at a personal level.¹⁵

An illustration or a personal account gives the conversation partner the opportunity to communicate an experience, not just an idea; showing is better than telling. Leighton Ford asserts that storytelling allows “gracious conversation”—that is, socially polite give-and-take that is generous in spirit—to balance informative conversation.¹⁶ By creating an interactive environment, welcoming feedback, and minimizing pressure to believe, the missional teacher is creating a safe space. Demonstrating some reality through a story provides the hearer mental process time. The equivalent of white space on a printed page, the natural embellishments of a good yarn give the mind time and space to reflect on what is happening and to respond to it.

Very practically, the purpose of illustrative stories is to clarify ideas, to help the hearer retain some information, and to reiterate a point without belaboring it.¹⁷ This clarity can be achieved by something as simple as St. Patrick’s legendary shamrock or

¹⁵ Steven Mosley, *Great Stories and How to Tell Them* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 7.

¹⁶ Ford, *The Power of Story*, 127.

¹⁷ Moreland and Muehlhoff, *The God Conversation*, 15-18.

William Young's dramatic fiction, *The Shack*, to depict the Trinity.¹⁸ A missional storyteller can learn how to bring details alive to make the point memorable. Because people also want to be entertained and not brow-beaten or bored, "we must make the grace and truth of Jesus Christ so vivid that it can be *seen* and *touched* by the minds and imaginations of the people around us."¹⁹ Also, as a person recalls a particular story after the meeting is over, God has another opportunity to work on the heart's renovation.

Several types of stories fit into informative conversation in the missional setting. First of all, the use of contemporary equivalents to tell a story from the Bible can invite the learners into the picture with God. Some accounts with very serious messages are, nevertheless, couched in humorous terms: Joseph resisting the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife; Aaron and the Israelites fashioning a golden calf while Moses is on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments; Jonah's attitude problem; and the frustrated fishermen getting advice from Jesus on where to cast their nets. A particularly good resource to help the missional teacher find those personal angles is *The Serendipity Bible*, which has questions for every passage in the Bible to help readers enter into the picture.²⁰

Secondly, purposeful missional teaching finds ways to invite the unchurched to tell their stories. Good questions to encourage their participation are represented by these examples: "What is the best thing that has ever happened to you?" "How did you cope?" "How did you get to be so [some positive trait]?" Or after telling a bit of what is going on personally, one can ask, "Has this ever happened to you? Tell me about it." What one

¹⁸ William P. Young, *The Shack* (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007).

¹⁹ Ford, *The Power of Story*, 115 and 118.

²⁰ Lyman Coleman and Dietrich Gruen, eds., *The Serendipity Bible: New International Version* (Littleton, CO: Serendipity House, 1988).

does with what one learns is part of the improvised music in the making. Ford is looking for ways to connect personal stories to God's Story: "Each of us has a story. . . . At some point in our journey through life, our story collides with the Story of God. . . . God's Story calls our story into question. We must make a choice: either to reject God's Story or to merge our story with His Story."²¹ Before the dynamic at work here actually becomes a collision, the missional teacher listens for the heart-cries of the lost in order to help them identify their place in relation to God. Informative conversation helps the learner articulate those cries, in story, poetry, journaling, music, art, or any other means of self-expression. For example, Pablo Picasso, upon hearing the news that Hitler's Luftwaffe had bombed a little Basque village, poured out the grief and terror of the devastated townspeople in the monochromatic painting *Guernica* (1937).²²

The cries of the heart that surface in gracious conversation may be interpreted in light of God's Story with the permission of the learner. God's Story may contain a parallel. For *Guernica*, this might have been the slaughter of the innocents in Matthew 2:16, a lament (Ps 22:1-2), or a response to calamity (Ps 7:9-16). Ford believes that people's experiences shape their need for God. Need of the Father's love is indicated by a longing: "for a sense of our origins, our roots, our meaning, and our place in the world."²³ Hunger for the Son's grace is often made manifest in perfectionism, rejection of inauthentic religion, or the inability to forgive or be forgiven.²⁴ People yearning for

²¹ Ford, *The Power of Story*, 10.

²² Russell Martin, *Picasso's War* (New York: Plume, 2003), 1-4.

²³ Ford, *The Power of Story*, 67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

control over their lives or a sense of personal empowerment might be open to God's Story of the Holy Spirit, who comes as an empowering presence. Virtual social networks do not obliterate the human need for community, and God's story offers true community—what Christians would call *koinonia* forged by the Spirit—to those who are lonely or alienated.²⁵ As learners are invited into God's narrative, they can discover the intersection with their stories, and be invited by the missional teacher to rewrite their scripts with a new ending.

Thirdly, dynamic metaphors are useful for illustrating doctrine. An excellent resource with helpful categories is *The God Conversation: Using Stories and Illustrations to Explain Your Faith*, by J. P. Moreland and Tim Muehlhoff. But for the missional teacher alert to images and metaphors, potential vehicles for telling God's Story abound in real life and on YouTube. Two examples follow.

The following is a true story that demonstrates the doctrine of the “already and not yet” quality of the Kingdom of God. In Concord, California in the 1970s, the art deco Enean Theatre was taken over by the Showcase Theatre to play pornographic movies. The very proper and family-oriented First Presbyterian Church in downtown was located directly behind the adult theatre, and for years the elders tried to find a way to put it out of business. Finally in 1980, the church bought the building only to discover that the Showcase held an unbreakable lease. So for three years the church was the proud owner of a porn theatre. The church possessed the deed to the building (“already”), but the devil occupied it (“not yet”), making headlines around the world. When the day of liberation

²⁵ Ford, *The Power of Story*, 146.

finally arrived, the building was gutted and transformed into the Presbyterian Community Center and became the catalyst for downtown redevelopment.²⁶

To demonstrate the threefold nature of faith—“Faith = Knowledge + Assent + Trust,” as mentioned in Chapter 2—one could use the story of Jean François Gravelot. In 1859, the famous French tightrope walker known as “The Great Blondin” strung a wire across Niagara Falls and, drawing a tense crowd of onlookers, walked across the thundering abyss with his balancing pole. To make the feat even more impressive, on the other side, he took a wheelbarrow and made the return trip pushing it in front of him. The crowd went wild and burst into applause. (Knowledge is instilled.) The stunt man shouted above the din, “Do you believe I can do it again?” And the crowd shouted back, “Yes! Again! You can do it! Again!” (Assent is given.) The man called out, “Okay then, who will get into the wheelbarrow?” (Trust is invited.)²⁷

Fourthly, stories have the potential to inspire by means of personal testimony or biographical examples of life transformation. People of the world are unlikely to grasp Kingdom realities without hearing from firsthand witnesses what their experiences were. The ever-present online invitation to “review this product [or restaurant, or service, or business]” offers people not only an opportunity to evaluate a vendor, but the resulting reviews give shoppers sought-after endorsements before taking risks themselves. So a Christian’s vivid story of encountering Jesus is essential for a seeker peering into the unknown before investing.

²⁶ Kent Richardson, “A History of First Presbyterian Church, Concord, California,” revised by David Stearns, <http://www.fpcconcord.org/history.htm> (accessed April 10, 2011).

²⁷ “Blondin’s Last Performance: Niagara Crossed with a Wheelbarrow on a Tight-rope,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1859.

Postmodern reliance on experience as the basis for belief offers a cautionary note to the Christian disciple preparing a testimony of faith. It is not one's experience of God that defines God, because any person's experience is by definition limited and local. Ford makes an important distinction: "We can share *out of* our own experience what *God* has done."²⁸ A testimony that is helpful in informative conversation points to the nature and acts of God and not the self. Christian screenwriter Steven Mosley, in his book, *Great Stories and How to Tell Them*, explains, "Testimony stories show God in action; they show what He can do. That's how He becomes real for our listeners. That's how all the abstractions, the adjectives, are given life."²⁹

The missional teacher should cultivate the discipline of attentiveness in order to see the messages of God's nature and activity all around. The habit of looking at life and its events as illustrations keeps one in a missional mindset. Maintaining a written journal of observations and musings helps to capture lessons as they present themselves. One never knows when an observation this week might become very relevant to a particular unchurched, de-churched, or religiously allergic person next week. Thoughtful reading of the daily newspaper or reputable news sources online provides an array of thought-provoking situations to talk about.³⁰ By telling stories that come out of these observations, missional teachers are able to bridge the chasm between the lost world of the unchurched and God's Kingdom.

²⁸ Ford, *The Power of Story*, 11 (emphasis added).

²⁹ Mosley, *Great Stories*, 32.

³⁰ Detweiler and Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings*, 295.

Once subject and general plot of a potentially useful story has been identified, it is good practice to construct its telling. Mosley breaks this task into three key components: “a setting we can visualize, a character we can care about, and actions that speak loudest.”³¹ Like an artist taking in a scene for painting, one who communicates through story must describe a few details of the scene to draw the listener in. This can be accomplished by imagining the sights, sounds, and smells of the location. An excellent example comes from the blog of a twenty-something volunteer spending a year in Hanoi:

I have very little experience with thunderstorms because I grew up on the West coast. I always thought I was afraid of thunder, but the afternoon storms we had last week have changed my mind. For four or five days in a row, clouds rolled in at about the same time every day, with consistent indications that it will rain. And rain hard. Suddenly, the sun is blocked. A cool wind picks up, which is the cue for everyone to start scurrying around, putting up tarps and getting home from wherever they are. It's a dangerous time to be on the road because people start driving faster and more recklessly. You can almost hear them thinking, “Gotta get home before it rains, gotta get home before it rains,” and soon you are infected with it. Suddenly, you want to go home, too.

It doesn't start raining right away. The wind kicks up and the clouds roll in, but it doesn't start raining until the blue sky is completely gone on the horizon and the sky is a consistent dark grey color. Then, a few big drops start falling. Immediately, people stop their motorbikes at the curb to put on ponchos or raincoats. And then, on cue, when everyone's finished dressing in protective gear, it pours. Soon, you can't hear anything but the rain on the street. Lightning starts. . . . It might start out at 20 seconds between the lightning bolt and thunder, but soon, and I mean real soon, it's down to 6 or 7. By that time, the rain is so strong that it hurts when it hits you, and the sky is so dark that it looks like midnight. When it's that dark, the lightning turns the sky pastel violet, a color I have never seen in the sky. It's absolutely beautiful.

The storms move fast. After only 20 or 30 minutes of rain, it stops. The clouds start to lighten, but the lightning and thunder stick around for a while longer. One night, the clouds rolled away right at sunset and the sky turned bright orange. Lightning was still cutting across the sky, but the thunder was a long way off. It was surreal. White lightning, orange sky in the west, purple sky in the east,

³¹ Mosley, *Great Stories*, 16.

no rain and far off thunder that sounded like a cat purring. Absolutely surreal. And I think, now, I like thunderstorms.³²

The missional storyteller notices the details, smells the aromas, and listens to the sounds.

In an effective story, the description of the central character should include one or two details that relate this person to the listener: something they have in common, a similar view of the world, contemporary vocabulary. Relatable actions at the beginning of the story capture the character's starting point, and as the tale unfolds, the character's reaction or change conveys the message. The storyline can take various forms: suspense, a hero's triumph, sweeping epic, or a slice of life. In all cases, a question or problem should be identified and worked through to some sort of resolution. For the missional teacher, that resolution is going to point toward the desired spiritual lesson, to pique curiosity, to affirm goodness, or to bring meaning to difficult situations.

Telling stories is a basic building block of informative conversation. In anticipation of opportunities to share stories, the Christian disciple journals the experiences, conversations, everyday events, and humorous anecdotes that might be useful in the future. The skills developed with this method can be applied in any situation where dialogue opens relational doors to "God's Story in Five Acts."

Spiritual Apprenticeship

Willard's contribution to the missional teaching dialogue is the concept of apprenticing oneself to Jesus with the Sermon on the Mount as the primary textbook. The sermon's aim, according to Willard, is consistent with the goal of missional teaching:

³² Judy Naegeli, "Weather," *Life Continued . . .* blog, May 20, 2006, <http://my.opera.com/blog/show.dml/261995> (accessed April 25, 2011).

“The aim of the sermon . . . is to help people come to hopeful and realistic terms with their lives here on earth by clarifying, in concrete terms, the nature of the kingdom into which they are now invited by Jesus’ call: ‘Repent, for life in the kingdom of the heavens is now one of your options.’ The separate parts of the discourse are to be interpreted in the light of this single purpose.”³³ Willard’s list of outcomes is very helpful and applicable to the apprenticeship model: helping people come to terms with their lives, clarifying the nature of the Kingdom, identifying the Kingdom as a viable option, and inviting them into that Kingdom. This entire process is conducted by means of guided learning experiences that arise out of teachable moments, with the goal being a movement toward Christlikeness.

The aim of apprenticing, as Willard states it, “consists simply in *bringing people to believe with their whole being the information they already have* as a result of their initial confidence in Jesus—even if that initial confidence was only the confidence of desperation.”³⁴ The master teacher’s goal is not to teach past the apprentice’s capacity for trust and obedience, but to milk out of every bit of acquired knowledge, no matter how small, some concrete way of trusting and following God. Put into the “mathematical” formula, F (faith) = K (knowledge) + A (assent) + T (trust), F can also be seen as the sum of several faith experiences ($f_1 = k_1 + a_1 + t_1$), that is, mustard seed faith (f) the sum of a bit of knowledge, assent to it, and trust in this one area. Subsequent faith-stretching experiences produce life-changing faith and Christlike character over time.

³³ Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 133.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 318.

Given that the unchurched, de-churched, or religiously allergic person has already indicated an aversion to anything “churchy,” care must be exercised to present choices for proceeding with a training experiment. So, for instance, in a Starbucks conversation the missional mentor discovers that his fellow San Francisco Giants fans are upset about the escalation of parking lot violence after games. They have opened a door to a teachable moment by expressing dissatisfaction with an experience. After exploring the dynamics of the situation through inductive questions, the mentor can begin to pull together the various elements of the conversation to establish a Kolb-like learning circle (figure 7). The relived experience of walking through a threatening post-game environment (a good storytelling opportunity) leads to a listing of specific offending behaviors and what might lie beneath them. Different interpretations might be shared in the conversation, including the missional teacher’s input highlighting Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount about anger (Mt 5:21-22). A challenge (homework) might be assigned to observe one’s own feelings and stresses following a losing game, and note the choice-point between insulting opposing fans and blessing them.

A missional teacher wishing to apprentice others to Jesus looks for teachable moments that can be expanded into experimental learning opportunities: “What would happen if we chose this route instead of that one next time?” Jesus challenged his disciples to feed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. His mentoring urged them to assess their resources, establish the need, determine the appropriate action, and follow through in faith. When that sequence faltered, due to the defeatist attitude of his apprentices, Jesus modeled an appropriate action with the unspoken assumption that next time, the disciples would try again (Mt 14:14-21).

The experience of Boy Scout Troop 212 illustrates the power of apprenticeship in the context of a missional community, as told by Moraga Scout Master Tom McIntosh:

This happened at Troop 212's Boy Scout summer camp a few years ago. We had a boy we'll call Joe in the troop—a nice boy about 14 years old—who was struggling to figure who and what he was and how to be a leader. He had just become a patrol leader for the Alpha Patrol.

About the second day at camp, shortly after lunch, the senior patrol leader came to me to report that the Alpha Patrol was demoralized and falling apart because the patrol leader (Joe) was beating up on the members of the patrol and physically abusing them. Obviously, physical abuse is not acceptable or permitted and is not good leadership.

The boy's father was a relatively new adult leader in the troop. The father took his son out of camp to talk to him while I got the patrol together to discuss what had been going on and what they felt was the proper remedial course of action. The assistant patrol leader spoke for the patrol and explained how they wanted to work with the patrol leader but that they could not continue as things were—understandable.

At about 7 o'clock I sat down with the boy's father to hear the outcome of his conversation with his son. Joe was remorseful, but his father felt that the boy's conduct was so negative and so likely to repeat itself, and no doubt known to the troop at large, that he should be removed from his position and taken home. My response was that I did not know what to do, but that removing the boy from his position and taking him home would end his scouting career and, thus, although perhaps the best course of action, was too radical to decide without thought. I counseled that we sleep on it, pray about it, and meet in the morning to decide.

That night I did not sleep much, but wrestled with the problem and what the solution should be and prayed, prayed a lot. During the night the answer came to me: there were three critical periods during the day when the activities were such that the problem occurred. So, why not assign a senior scout as a mentor to the boy to be present in the patrol area during those critical times to stabilize, to guide, and to counsel the boy and his patrol, as need arose.

In the morning, I met with the father and presented my plan to him. He agreed. Then I met with the senior patrol leader and presented my solution to him and he agreed. Then we met with Joe and the patrol to present our plan to them; they all bought into it and supported it, so we implemented it. It worked!

The results: Joe continued as patrol leader and made it through the week without further negative incident; he grew through the experience; the patrol recovered and felt good about being a part of a solution to a problem, a solution that helped a scout who was a good boy but who used negative methods to achieve a result; the mentor felt fulfilled and good about helping another scout through a growing up problem.

Bottom line: this week (four years later) Joe, his assistant patrol leader, and the mentor will be receiving their Eagle Awards.³⁵

The Joint Adventure Model

The third model for informative conversation is the joint adventure in which the missional teacher plays the role of adventure guide. *Outside Magazine* advertises reliable adventure planners around the globe. These businesses have scouted out the most thrilling and fulfilling trips for people who want to get the most out of life. The routes and itineraries are developed with particular participants in mind, described by their fitness levels, experience, and openness to risk. Unlike a travel agency, which establishes the itinerary and makes the reservations for the tourist to carry out alone, the adventure outfit sends along a guide to accompany the adventurers at every step of the way. What makes the situation appealing to the client is that the guide has gone the route before, knows the ropes (sometimes literally), understands the climate and weather patterns, and is acquainted with the local resources. Every trip is a little different, due both to changing natural conditions and the variations in personality type among clients, but the guide knows, in general, what is coming, equips the adventurer, and interprets what is happening along the way.

So it is with the missional teacher as spiritual adventure guide. The adventure in the missional setting is life as it unfolds for the unchurched, de-churched, or religiously allergic person who is now in some kind of fellowship with a Christian disciple. As conversation unfolds in repeated meetings over coffee, the natural topic is “what’s happening.” In authentic sharing, both the adventure guide and the “client” open up about

³⁵ Tom McIntosh, email to the author, April 11, 2011.

life's struggles, fears, survival tests, whatever has come up lately. Coffee shop meetings are the opportunity for debriefing, learning from experience, or strategizing for the next round of challenge.

Because this is more than mentoring, the added dimension in adventure guidance is actually participating side by side in the circumstances of life. For the missional teacher, this means entering (graciously and with permission) into the life of the adventurer and participating in the situations now identified as difficult or challenging. One enters the world of another by empathy, personal presence, and real time spent together where the challenge focuses.

In *Missional Renaissance*, McNeal tells the story of “Sylvia,” an unmarried woman, mother of two, who gave birth to quintuplets. The ladies at the church nearby knew she was completely overwhelmed and discouraged, and they wanted to help. So Kathy, the one among them who knew the young mom personally, was instructed to offer babysitting by the church ladies so Sylvia could go to the Beth Moore Bible study at the church. Kathy appreciated the fact that the women wanted to help, but suggested another approach. She says, “You know, I think what Sylvia would *really* appreciate is some help doing the laundry and folding diapers for an hour. You’d be surprised what she wants to talk about if given a chance like that.” Diaper folding (and cleaning and even renovating the house) became the “third place” of Sylvia’s missional setting, the occasion out of real life where the Kingdom of God could be demonstrated. On the side, teachable moments presented themselves, and the fellowship of older women—some were also very experienced mothers—provided a steady stream of opportunities to guide the adventure, rally resources, and solve problems. Their commitment to do so until the children are in

school has resulted in a close bond between women, a shared adventure, and spiritual conversation when needed and appropriate. This is training for real life, learning as one goes and surviving as a band of travelers, not always knowing what is around the corner, but willing to deal with whatever happens.³⁶

Very much in the spirit of novelist Samuel Butler (1835-1902), who said, “Life is like playing a violin in public and learning the instrument as one goes on,” the process of making disciples is a learn-as-you-go affair. Not only is the skeptic learning, but the missional teacher is also adapting to ever-changing conditions. It is like feeling one’s way through a maze, discovering dead ends along the way and unlearning unproductive routes of pursuit. Reimagining evangelism, Rick Richardson highlights the power of transparency in the missional community: “Good travel guides know that stories of failure and struggle and doubt, of wrong turns and missed opportunities, are as important and compelling for other travelers as stories of success. They are the ‘humanizing’ dimension of the story of the journey and the source of many of the most important lessons and points along the way.”³⁷

What results from this authentic real-life engagement is a sense of belonging for all who are participating, the adventurer and the guide. In this context, the adventurer participates in the life of faith by processing events from a spiritual perspective offered by the guide. From that “within” vantage point, the adventurer is in a better position to learn, grow, and develop a lasting bond among Christian disciples. In the fifth century,

³⁶ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 75-76; embellishments to the story provided by Dr. McNeal, “Missional Leadership: Character, Context, and Challenge” (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Honolulu, HI, August 5, 2008).

³⁷ Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 23.

St. Patrick offered barbarians a chance to belong before they believed. The twenty-first-century adventure guide employs the same strategy, demonstrating Kingdom values and worldview while living among those who might not interface with believers in any other way. If this model is effective, no other way is necessary for bringing a skeptic or religiously allergic person to a crossroads, where one has a choice to believe or not.

Summary and Transition

The success of these three models, storytelling, apprenticeship, and adventure, depends on certain conditions. The church body must bless them, a missional community must be involved, and missional teachers must embody certain characteristics and gifts. These conditions and more are explored in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 8

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS IN MISSIONAL TEACHING

The success of non-traditional methods for teaching in the missional setting rests on certain requirements. All levels—the church, the missional community, and individual teachers—each contribute an essential element to the project of reaching the unchurched nearby. They also have the potential for derailing a missional effort if some requirements are not met. Missional teachers who are planting Kingdom life in a neighborhood third place depend on the moral support and cooperation of the communities seeding their efforts, as will be described in this chapter.

An Outward-moving Congregation

Successful missional teaching requires a secure sense of the Church gathered and sent, relinquishing the need to take corporate credit for the spiritual harvest. The congregation that decides to seed a missional effort through incarnational ministry will be helpful to that endeavor if it is secure in its missional identity. Hirsch refers to “Apostolic Genius” and the constituent elements of “mDNA” (“missional DNA”) as the “built-in life force and guiding mechanism of God’s people” that propels them into outward mission

and evangelism.¹ If a congregation is convinced that it is in the genes of the church to move outward and multiply itself through its proclamation and demonstration of Christ's Lordship, then it will offer true support to missional communities and individual missional leaders. Multiplying itself, in the missional context, does not mean increasing its own membership on campus, but planting new churches with a church-sent missional community at the core.

A corporate sense of calling to God's mission enables a congregation to gather for worship and send it out again—no strings attached—strengthened for missional encounters. It sees worship as stoking the fire, feeding the soul, and strengthening the will for those who will be sent out into the world for ministry. If a church jealously hangs on to its members for fear of losing them to the missional setting, it ultimately creates a closed loop that is unsustainable as well as disobedient to the Great Commission. The congregation *will* lose members to new missional outposts, but should rejoice that this is happening and encourage the movement as one method of pruning, which yields greater crops later (Jn 15:2). As the saying goes, "There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit."² This attitude expresses the spirit of missional DNA, and points to the sort of institutional humility that is a prerequisite for missional advancement.

Pastors committed to their flock's outward movement in mission will redefine success by making the three missional shifts discussed in Chapter 5. In particular, a

¹ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 18-20.

² Often attributed to Ronald Reagan, the quotation was not original to him; it appeared on a plaque in his Oval Office. The quote, in one form or another, dates to Father Strickland in 1863: "A Man May Do an Immense Deal of Good, If He Does Not Care Who Gets the Credit," Quote Investigator blog, December 21, 2010, <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/12/21/doing-good-selfless/> (accessed April 26, 2011).

pastor seeking missional impact will put less stock in the traditional indicators of success (e.g., numerical growth, financial giving, and campus size) and focus on the impact church members are having on their community. This impact will leverage the spiritual growth of disciples making disciples and develop a non-competitive spirit with other churches working in the same area.

The missional movement disengages members from the sending congregation and disperses them to ever-widening circles of new influence in the missional setting. An example of this dynamic is promoted by David Fitch, a Christian Missionary Alliance pastor, who critiqued the typical church scorecard and offered an alternative: as soon as a church reaches 150 members, a missional community should be identified to disengage and start again to plant a new congregation.³ In order for the unchurched, de-churched, and religiously allergic to come in contact with Christian instruction, the institutional Church must fade into the background so that emerging missional communities can move to the foreground. Those who respond to the gospel may or may not ever make their way to the church campus, but the Kingdom will have expanded if they form a new culturally embedded missional outpost.

A Well-placed Missional Community

The success of missional teaching also relies on effective missional communities out of which it springs. Though a congregation as a whole can take on the identity of missional community, for the present purpose, the term “missional community” as Guder

³ David E. Fitch, *The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism, and Other Modern Maladies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 229.

uses it describes a subset of a congregation (or a newly constituted group itself).⁴ A missional community is a group of people willing to disengage from the programmatic elements of a larger congregation in order to establish a local, relational presence of the Kingdom of God. Guder identifies the purpose: “to be a source of radical hope, to witness to the new identity and vision, the new way of life that has become a social reality in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁵ One such missional community was planted in the Sandtown area of Baltimore, Maryland, in 1986. Mark Gornik and another family—“the first white folks ever”—moved into vacant houses they rehabilitated.⁶ They “hung out on the streets and attended community meetings, and spent time with the children of Sandtown.”⁷ They accompanied this distressed urban neighborhood through the struggle for peace and community development. Reflecting on eleven years of ministry through New Song Community Church, Gornik observed, “A church *with* community [Sandtown] becomes one with its neighbors in the struggle. The community defines the church’s mission and identity. . . . Indeed, rightly framed, the church is not only *with* the community but *of* the community.”⁸ Only a missional community embedded within the neighborhood, thus “involved in the mix, flow, and fray of

⁴ Guder, *The Missional Church*, 210.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁶ LaVerne S. Stokes, preface to *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City*, by Mark Gornik (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2002), xiii.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Gornik, *To Live in Peace*, 113-14.

[neighborhood] life,” can share in its suffering and “pour itself out so that God’s *shalom* can be more deeply experienced.”⁹

The mission of the embedded covenant community is multifaceted: 1) to exercise spiritual gifts including compassion, discernment, wisdom, and teaching, 2) to create or capture teachable moments while relating to the unchurched, 3) to establish authenticity and transparency through hospitality, 4) to take life and circumstances as they come and model a Kingdom response, 5) to engage in the group dynamics of the local systems (government, school, community activists) for the purpose of sharing the city’s challenges, and 6) to listen corporately for the heart-cries and questions of their unchurched neighbors and seek ways to give answer that will draw them into God’s Story. In a sense, the missional community specializes in the personality and needs of a specific tribe of unchurched people and can do so unencumbered by the “one size fits all” approach a church with buildings must maintain in order to reach as many people as possible. A missional community is more flexible due to its relatively small size (the number of people who fit into a normal living room in their neighborhood, for instance) and more responsive to changing circumstances due to its disengagement from entrenched programs and its ability to listen and learn from the neighbors.

Those who desire to teach missionally are more effective if they exercise a missional identity in Christian community, led by the Spirit, as opposed to working alone. In *koinonia* fellowship, they build trust and accountability with each other necessary for teaching and learning. They form a praying community assured of Christ’s presence in their midst (Mt 18:19-20) and wisdom for their course of action (Jas 1:5). Their

⁹ Gornik, *To Live in Peace*, 113-14.

fellowship is a model of the relationships possible in God's Kingdom, characterized by mutual forbearance, genuine love, and a spirit of servanthood. They each have the opportunity to exercise different spiritual gifts, all for building up the Body (Eph 4:12).

The missional learning community, as a microcosm of the Church, is called upon to display the interplay of different skills beyond the spiritual gift of teaching. These include but are not limited to emotional intelligence, active listening, needs assessment, cultural familiarity, and so-called tent-making skills (Acts 18:3), which are needed for the covenant community to function as a mission outpost. Among the qualities (distinct from skills) that should grow in this fellowship, the following are of particular relevance to missional teaching: 1) passion for the lost, a heart for evangelism; 2) spiritual maturity, evidenced by fruit of the Spirit, faith integrated into everyday life, foundational knowledge of Scripture and theology, and well-developed sense of ministry call; 3) ability to exegete, understand, and integrate Scripture as it applies in the cultural context; 4) spiritual discernment of God's activity in and among people in the missional setting; and 5) a willingness to suspend judgment in the missional context. A non-judgmental attitude is evident in the way a missional teacher relates to the most resistant conversation partner: low reactivity or defensiveness to "hostile" ideas, effective listening skills, and comfort collaborating with diverse people on their turf.¹⁰

To these group characteristics, two more can be added: 6) a personality that thrives in change and a changing environment (apostolic courage with a firm grasp of the gospel among a new group of people), incarnational resilience (the ability to adapt to a

¹⁰ Mary Holder Naegeli, "An Assessment of Fuller Northern California as Missional Equipper" (final project for OD750 "Spirituality and Leadership," Fuller Theological Seminary, 2007), 8-17.

new and culturally different environment), and ministry creativity (the capacity to try new methods for achieving ministry goals); and 7) a ministry style that maintains balance between missional vision and Christian nurture of those already in the missional community. No one person has them all; rather, a missional community should seek to find them expressed among its members for a full expression of the Body of Christ.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, where large-city stresses and suburban isolation tend to cause people to detach themselves spiritually, the existence of a missional community within those contexts speaks volumes about the gospel. The missional community that fosters relationships among the unchurched yet retains its Kingdom identity presents an anomaly to a watching neighborhood. Caring indiscriminately for those who come in contact with them, missional small groups live out a basic method of witness (“everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,” Jn 13:34f) and create teachable moments in a non-threatening context.

Called and Equipped Missional Teachers

Missional leaders, as representatives of Christ’s Kingdom, are a particularly called, gifted, and skilled group of people who are willing to give up the comforts of an established congregation in order to embed themselves in their communities. The commitment required to do this takes a work of the Holy Spirit, who overrides the natural tendency to nest in a safe environment. Even gifted and called disciples require equipping for missional leadership, so the preparatory task is twofold: identify those with missional aptitudes and design a learning experience that will equip them for the work ahead.

Qualities of the Missional Teacher

Ideally, a congregation or seminary mentors individuals who show an aptitude as well as a sense of call to missional teaching. In fact, the Fuller Northern California faculty and staff adopted a local mission statement, “FNC exists to equip missional leaders for the work of God’s Kingdom.”¹¹ In 2007, FNC students participated in an evaluation I spearheaded to determine whether the seminary in fact was accomplishing its goal. In the course of this assessment, local Fuller leaders developed a list of qualities desired for missional leadership.

This input was gathered into a Doctor of Ministry course project identifying abilities, aptitudes, and traits necessary for the missional enterprise.¹² They were organized around four relational categories: upward (relationship with God), inward (relationship with self), among (relationship with other believers), and outward (relationship with others). Since missional work is spiritually challenging, psychologically and, at times, even physically demanding (e.g., being involved in a long conversation until Starbucks closes), the following requirements under Upward, Inward, Among, and Outward were deemed necessary to sustain missional effort. For a summary of the traits and aptitudes required for missional leadership, see Appendix B.

Dependence upon Jesus Christ (Upward)

Firstly, the basic motivation and power for missional work comes from Jesus himself, and the cooperative disciple responds to the call and empowerment of God with

¹¹ Fuller Seminary Northern California: “Have you ever thought about coming to Seminary?” <http://www.fuller.edu/campuses-online/northern-california.aspx> (accessed July 11, 2011).

¹² Naegeli, “Assessment.”

obedience to the Great Commission. An individual will run dry spiritually unless fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit and spiritually strengthened for the task. The necessity of this dependence, and trust in Christ's provision, cannot be overestimated. Roberta Hestenes, long-time president of the board of World Vision International, observes the link: "Missionary service with an organization like World Vision is possible only with God's help and a vibrant, ongoing relationship with Jesus. I have seen unbelievers, motivated by a strong desire to help the weak, burn out all too soon because they had no spiritual well to draw from."¹³ The work of living into the Kingdom of God while embedded in the world and all its challenges is just as draining as traveling halfway around the world to feed the hungry. Security in the knowledge that one is beloved of God, called by Jesus, and empowered by the Spirit creates a sustainable dynamic and is essential for the missional teaching effort.

An intimate relationship with Christ not only nourishes the believer's soul for service, but also enables the Christian disciple to leave the results of teaching/learning efforts up to God. Missional teachers would love to see the fruit of their labor, and as was discussed in Chapter 2; this would include seeing learners cross the threshold into trusting relationships with the Savior. Even if this last step turns out to be impossible for the moment, however, the missional teacher—of all God's agents in the world—can rest in the ministry of faithfulness, supported and cheered by God's sustaining power.

Trust and dependence upon Jesus Christ day by day is also the best defense against the evil one, who is opposed to missional teaching efforts. One must have a strong faith in God and acknowledge that the principalities and powers are actively

¹³ Roberta Hestenes, private conversation with the author, June 2004.

seeking to devour any missional fruit. Denial of evil's reality empties Kingdom work of its redemptive purpose, but standing against the powers of darkness galvanizes disciples for action.

Integrated and Healthy Personality (Inward)

Missional teachers are in a stronger position for their work if they enjoy emotional and psychological health. An appropriate differentiation of the self enables bridge-builders to maintain their ties to the "God's Story" end of the bridge even while crossing over to plant themselves among the lost and spiritually disoriented. This is not to say that a missional teacher must be problem-free, because missional engagement sometimes requires the believer to share personal struggles. Nevertheless, the work itself requires disciples to be integrated human beings, emotionally healthy and invulnerable to the traps set by borderline personalities, seducers, liars, or manipulators. In this sense, the requirement is no more and no less than what is needed for a pastor of a congregation to function in good mental health.

With that general emotional health intact, the missional teacher can more easily assume a position *with*, not *to*, the unchurched—in partnership with one's neighbors rather than opposite them. Incarnational ministry requires identification with the unchurched in a positive, proactive style, working together to conduct the experiment of faith as a way of life. As Christ did, so the disciple invites relationship, comes alongside as a peer, and is adaptable to unfolding situations. This is not to say that disciples are not sent by Christ and his Church "to" the lost, which they are, but their purpose in going into the world is to stand in solidarity "with" it and ministry "within" rather than from

without. This point was illustrated by the New Song Community Church in Baltimore, above. The unchurched perceives the difference between “to” and “with” through the attitude of the Christian, who can come across either as the savior from on high or the one walking alongside to help. Unasked-for advice or a “holier than thou” attitude conveys the first mindset; mutual agreement, empathy, and humility characterize the second. If one pictures oneself as a fellow learner in the school of Christian discipleship, and exhibits a willingness to learn while in relationship with the religiously resistant person, it is likely that a teaching/learning partnership will flourish. This attitude is only possible if one nurtures emotional health with the help of the Spirit.

Appreciation of Varied Gifts in the Community (Among)

Paul’s teaching about one Body and many members (1 Cor 12) requires each member of the missional community to welcome every other member’s contribution, resting in the knowledge that no one of them possesses all the necessary gifts. The individuals must be secure enough in themselves and with the group to forsake competition for recognition or power. In fact, one of the most winsome characteristics of a missional small group may become the quality of its life together as fellow servants to each other and to their neighbors. This quality of group life can emerge only if the individuals participating can humble themselves in the spirit of Christ. As newcomers come into the fellowship, belonging before believing, individual missional teachers show a generosity of heart to welcome them and model a godly way of life in community.

Commitment to Kingdom Values of Righteousness and Justice (Outward)

Missional teachers rely not only on words, but also on actions to instruct others about God's purposes in the world. For the unchurched, the only way to discover that God is righteous (truly good) and just is to watch Christ's disciples act in good and just ways where least expected. Believers who emphasize Kingdom values and incarnational ministry are shining "the bright light of the Kingdom in what appears to be the most hopeless and forsaken places."¹⁴ Over the millennia, Christians have specialized in ministry to the sick, ignorant, abandoned, and dying; in the Bay Area, the missional equivalent is ministry to HIV patients, the homeless, high school dropouts, people with disabilities, and hospice patients. If missional teachers want to instruct the unchurched in Christlikeness, one strategy is to research together the needs evident in the local community and then involve themselves as a team to help. Teachable moments abound in the experiences and debriefing that follows.

Equipping Missional Leaders for the Work of the Kingdom

Missional teaching is not for everybody, and those who are called to it must be equipped by the local church or seminary. However, not all of the identified qualities can be nurtured or taught in a seminary curriculum. Nonetheless, several key areas can be addressed outright in equipping courses, and the means can be found to observe and evaluate progress.

In the course of Fuller Northern California's evaluation described above, I devised a questionnaire that was administered to Fuller Seminary cohort students in 2007

¹⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 18.

(Appendix C). The survey functioned as a needs assessment, and student responses provided helpful data to establish a starting point for equipping them in the following areas deemed relevant to the missional endeavor: exercise of spiritual discipline, identification with one's mission focus, living context, how the student works with a person holding opposing views of the faith, how the student deals with conflict, and attitude toward those hostile to Christianity. The questionnaire was originally distributed to approximately thirty-three students, with a response rate of 42 percent. Based on the findings from this study, key topics and learning experiences were organized to address directly the needs of potential missional teachers.

Fruit of this labor was born in spring 2010, when twenty Fuller Northern California students were equipped for missional leadership (including teaching) through the course I designed and taught for Fuller, PM514: "The Missional Church and Its Leadership." The Expanded Course Description (Appendix C) articulated the learning objectives for this class:

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Students completing this course will have demonstrated (1) an understanding of God's mission, the nature of the Kingdom of God, and our role as God's mission partners, from a biblical, theological, and historical perspective; (2) a holy dissatisfaction with the church's response to shifts in American culture and the challenges of post-modernism, through its leadership, forms and programs; (3) ability to identify missional aptitude and willingness to undergo personal change in order to respond to God's mandate for mission; (4) skill in engaging the religiously allergic in meaningful learning experiences in "third places" as practice for incarnational ministry; and (5) creativity in the design of a missional leadership project which either transforms an existing ministry or establishes a new one with missional focus.¹⁵

¹⁵ Mary Holder Naegeli, "The Missional Church and Its Leadership" (expanded course description, Fuller Northern California, 2010).

The class was organized to approach the missional task from four perspectives: biblical theology, prevailing culture, ecclesiology, and missional leadership. Each of these elements was explored in sequences represented by figure 11. Ultimately, the class was arranged in ten weekly three-hour sessions that carried these four sequences progressively through the quarter. The students were administered the aforementioned questionnaire as a pre-test of aptitude and gifts for missional engagement. At the end of the quarter, they turned in final projects that required them to analyze and synthesize course content with their own leadership assessment and proposals for missional ministry.

Bible/Theology	Culture	Church	Leadership
Theological Basis for Missional Endeavor (C. J. H. Wright)	Define "culture"	Paradigm shift (pictures)	OBSERVE: Pre-Test (Dawkins reaction)
The Story We Tell (God's Story in Five Acts)	What is <i>our</i> culture? • Language • Media & Tech • Social Patterns • Generations • Postmodernism	A history of the shape of the church → Church's relationship with the world: assimilation? incarnation? (Newbigen, Niebuhr)	THINK: Qualities of Traditional Church Leadership (inductive)
The World (into which the Kingdom comes)	Opportunities for Missional Engagement in This Culture (McNeal Readiness Factors) • Rise in Altruism Economy • Striving for Personal Growth • Heightened search for "spirituality"	Discussion of Hirsch's key concepts: the central affirmations of the church (Jesus is Lord, Kingdom of God is at Hand) and mDNA of apostolic genius	DISCUSS: Qualities of a Missional Leader (inductive)
The Kingdom of God (see Guder)			Difference between transitional and missional leadership
Biblical Paradigms for Self-Identity (Exiles, Remnant, Conqueror, Closet Christian . . .)			PLAN: Transitional Leadership Goals (Guder Power Point (Roxburgh zones)
The Church As It Was Meant to Be (<i>The Forgotten Ways</i>)	How does our culture perceive the God-Jesus-Story?	Shift from Inward to Outward Focus (McNeal)	Missional Leadership Goals
Examples of Cultural Engagement (Exile, Daniel, Paul in Athens)	The Heart-Questions of Our Neighbors à la Avril L'Avigne	Program Driven vs. People Developing (McNeal) → Needs Assessment by Generation	Ministry Skills for Transitional Leaders
The Great Commission The Great Commandment The Great Requirement	Who are our "neighbors" and what are we expected to do with them?	Issues in Transition: Institution vs. Kingdom of God	Ministry Skills for Missional Leaders
		The role of clergy and church structure in the missional setting	EXPERIMENT: Creating a Space for God in My Neighborhood
			ACCOUNTABILITY: Personal Leadership Assessment
			Post-test → ACT (final project)

Figure 11. PM514 Missional Church and Leadership: Four Tracks to Explore (Sequences)

Interacting with this class confirmed one insight gleaned from previous student questionnaires: there was a correlation between a potential missional teacher's conflict management style and the ability to engage constructively with a hostile, religiously

allergic person. These were measured using a modified Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument for determining behavior in conflict situations¹⁶ and an exercise in which the students were asked to respond to an “atheistic diatribe” taken from Richard Dawkins’s book, *The God Delusion*.¹⁷ The Thomas-Kilmann exercise was intended to identify those students who exhibited a collaborative style in the midst of conflict, the style most consistent with missional goals in informative conversation. *The God Delusion* exercise asked for three responses to an inflammatory attack on Christianity: immediate emotional reaction (to assess reactivity), restatement of Dawkins’s argument (to assess comprehension of worldly view), and one’s own response if this atheistic diatribe were to be part of a Starbucks conversation (to assess listening skills, reactivity, and heart for the lost). Responses were collated first from the Fuller Northern California cohorts in spring 2007 and then from subsequent Fuller classes, including the PM514 group of spring 2010.

A majority of students showed avoidance behavior (instead of competition, accommodation, collaboration, or compromise) as their most likely conflict style, consistent with anecdotal evidence about pastors in general. Of these, half were not able to track reasonably with the atheistic diatribe and one other student actually demonstrated avoidance of conversation at Starbucks. Only one student scored highest on collaboration, the desired style for missional teachers. There were a surprising number of compromisers and accommodators and only one competitor. Compromising and

¹⁶ Ralph Kilmann, *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument also known as TKI* (Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc., 1974-2009), <http://www.kilmann.com/conflict.html> (accessed April 19, 2011).

¹⁷ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006). See Appendix C for the excerpt in the complete survey.

accommodating are low-assertion styles, but more likely relational and therefore understandable in the missional setting, if not spiritually risky.

Students' responses to the paragraph from *The God Delusion* were telling. Immediate reactions ranged from anger and disgust to sadness and attempts at empathy. Some laughed, or thought, "What an idiot," while others never engaged at a feeling level at all, but were defensive on the rational plane instead. The range of immediate reactions was within expectations, and did not, in the end, seem to correlate with responses to the next two questions. The purpose of the question was to determine whether reactivity closed off avenues for rational engagement with someone in conversation at Starbucks.

Of interest from a knowledge-based point of view, six of the fourteen respondents did not demonstrate comprehension of the atheistic argument. Four of those six indicated that they would stop listening, give a "speech," challenge according to their own presumptions, or give an opposing viewpoint. None of the six engaged in active listening once the diatribe was given. Those who managed a fairly good intellectual grasp of the accusation against God, on the other hand, were far more likely to ask probing questions, listen actively, find ways of affirming the person while continuing the conversation, or show respect to the hostile individual. This is probably the most significant finding: those possessing the greatest intellectual clarity (higher critical thinking, not doctrinal purity, which was not measured here) were most able to stay in a conversation with a hostile atheist, even if their initial reaction was, "What an idiot," or anger.

The correlation between conflict style and demonstrated response to the atheistic diatribe was significant. Avoidance most often correlated with non-engagement; those with more evenly distributed conflict styles were the ones who saw themselves engaged

in meaningful conversation with the hostile atheist. This would suggest that the typical pastoral pattern of conflict avoidance would discourage that pastor from engaging in the rough-and-tumble interactions characteristic of the missional setting.

The connection between intellectual clarity and engagement at Starbucks was particularly helpful. Since Fuller Northern California—missionally minded or not—has the goal of helping students think critically about the Scriptures, the Christian faith, and church history, it is encouraging that those who did best in this difficult encounter were those who were able to articulate their faith most clearly. This suggests to Fuller’s ministry equippers, and to pastors in congregations beyond that elite group, that practical application of concepts, theories, and doctrines to real-life situations by means of case studies, Socratic inquiry, class projects—even a debate club—would be fruitful. Master of Divinity students at Fuller will remember Systematic Theology professor Dr. Ray Anderson who assigns four case study responses “in plain, non-technical English” on topics ranging from theological anthropology to eschatology. The required technical footnotes add another two pages (to prove familiarity with the academic resources), but by this exercise students learn to articulate a clear theology to ordinary people. The PM514 data reported here suggests that theological education with this practical application approach is indeed relevant and necessary to the missional task.

Summary

Teaching in the missional setting is fraught with challenges, but the hope would be that those challenges are not self-inflicted within the Christian body but only by the

dynamics of the culture. The success of non-traditional methods of teaching depends on the cooperation of the congregation, the missional community, and the individual storytellers, adventure guides, and master teachers called to this ministry. The congregation and its leadership give the greatest encouragement by sending its missionaries into the community with no strings of obligation attached and without the expectation that missional teaching will result necessarily in increased church membership. The missional community specializing in a particular neighborhood's culture will cultivate curiosity among the unchurched if it fully participates in the local scene and presents itself as servant and fellow-learners, committed for the long haul. It will also help the overall missional teaching endeavor by supporting the work of its teachers, holding them accountable for faith as a way of life, and living corporately the application of what they are trying to teach. The ministry will thrive also if the teachers themselves are gifted and skilled at the art of informative conversation, with all it entails in storytelling, active listening, doctrinal accuracy, and commitment to the lost. Missional teaching requires not only the spiritual gift of teaching (which is very helpful), but the interplay of many gifts exercised by the missional community to back up the essential message. The Church at large, especially as resourced by the seminaries, will be most helpful and encouraging as it equips these saints for the work of service in missional teaching. Critical to this equipping is teaching disciples how to tell God's Story and how to relate it to the stories of those they will meet at Starbucks, the gym, or on the soccer field sidelines.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The primary question addressed by this paper was, “Would the Church be more effective in making disciples if it were to teach potential disciples in the missional setting, before their conversion and baptism, to obey everything Jesus has told them?” After considering the biblical mandate and its implications for contemporary application, the conclusion is inevitable: Yes, the Church would be more effective in making disciples if teaching were a part of the process from first contact forward.

After exploring the meaning of Christ’s final command, it was demonstrated that its mandate, even today, is impossible to escape. The Great Commission prescribes that teaching be part of the disciple-making process, to commence before potential disciples have believed and been baptized and to continue afterwards. What this paper has named “missional teaching,” or its cousin, “informative conversation,” fulfills this aspect of Christ’s mandate by being the bridge between God’s World (the Kingdom) and the province of the unchurched (the World). This bridge allows the unchurched, de-churched, and spiritually allergic access to a Christ-centered worldview: 1) missional teaching explains what God is like, what God has done throughout history, and how God interprets the messiness of real life (the telling of “God’s Story in Five Acts”); 2) it demonstrates the good life produced by doing as Jesus commanded (missional community modeling Kingdom living where the unchurched can see and participate in it); and 3) it welcomes the participation of newcomers on a trial/experimental basis (invitation to investigate the possibilities of a transformed life).

The twenty-first-century missional challenge can be met with a modified and modernized application of first-century missional teaching. Despite human advancements that have come with history, spiritual needs are still fundamentally the same: people need to know that they are loved by God, but that their relationship to him has been interrupted by the belief that they can live without him. They need to know that God—good, powerful, merciful, and redeeming—has been committed to working among people since the beginning of history. God made himself known in the Son Jesus Christ, who alone can reinstate that broken relationship and give lives their proper meaning and purpose. This same God imparts the power of the Holy Spirit to live differently—better—not only for the believer’s own sake but for the benefit of the world. Knowledge of these facts, discovery of their true relevance, and trust in God who is behind them add up to the faith every person in the world needs to satisfy spiritual hunger. That much has not changed in two thousand years. It is only the methods employed to meet those needs that must be examined, updated, and utilized.

However, the twenty-first-century American missional setting, as exemplified by the San Francisco Bay Area, does present some particular challenges related to philosophical shifts, cultural phenomena, and information technology. There is no doubt that twenty-first-century trends such as postmodernism have posed significant roadblocks to teaching disciples. The message is countercultural: Jesus Christ emerged out of a great metanarrative to embody the Truth and define the way to live for humanity. Despite the religious allergy this truth claim might trigger, there are possible points of entry into contemporary sensibilities. Twenty-first-century society offers some unique opportunities

for missional advance, opportunities that invite hands-on engagement for the purpose of building bridges between God's Kingdom and the local province of the World.

Unfortunately, it has been demonstrated that traditional Christian education for adults has not necessarily equipped the saints for making new disciples. This disappointing outcome to the resurgence of adult education in the last fifty years reflects primarily on the disconnection between old methods and new social realities. Thus, new ways and methods for teaching, specifically in the missional setting, are needed.

The bad news is that there is resistance to the idea of missional teaching from the potential Christian teacher and from the unchurched. For different reasons, each poses attitudinal hindrances to informational and transformational teaching. The good news is that these hurdles can be overcome if the Church can adopt a new self-image (equipper and sender rather than gatherer) and teachers can grow in their love for the lost enough to adopt new bridge-building methods of teaching.

Out of this love for the lost, church leaders should conduct an examination of their ministries and evaluate their ways of teaching. The following questions might be helpful for such an evaluation: If the unchurched really think the gospel story is irrelevant, how might the missional community demonstrate the connection between faith and everyday life? In what practical way does Christian faith inform and invigorate a satisfying way of life? Does the ministry of teaching foster an environment in which these connections between biblical truth and everyday life can be made? If not, who is to blame the unchurched for concluding that Christianity is irrelevant? If the unchurched really think the gospel story is intimidating, how might the missional community demonstrate Jesus' perfect balance between grace and truth, between mercy and justice,

between information and transformation? Are intimidating teaching methods employed at the time of instruction, methods which rely on the power and expertise of the teacher and demand the passivity or performance of the learner? Does the ministry of teaching foster genuine love, tenderness toward the truth, humility, and mutual forbearance? If not, who is to blame the unchurched for concluding that Christianity is intimidating? If gospel instruction is truly unwelcome to the unchurched, how might the missional community demonstrate its reality in other ways—other than traditional teaching—that could be welcomed?

There are many different ways to teach, and ample evidence was provided from the Scriptures to demonstrate that God has given his people permission to be creative as to method. Coming from another angle, educational theorists were enlisted to corroborate the thesis that a relational approach to teaching is both effective and superior to traditional methods of instruction. From both a biblical and educational point of view, then, it was asserted that missional teaching at its best takes place in gracious and informative conversation around a subject of interest to both the unchurched and the Christ-follower as co-learners.

In this light, three models for missional teaching at Starbucks (or another informal setting) were introduced and described to suggest the array of possibilities for informative conversation. Based on improvisational scripts, the missional teacher can relate to the unchurched as storyteller, mentor in an apprentice relationship, or adventure guide. As the relationship unfolds, teachable moments signaled by questions and heart-cries of the unchurched are captured. The missional teacher makes known—through story, testimony, or illustration—how a Kingdom worldview revealed through God’s Story speaks into a

person's story. At all times, the missional teacher is participating in an exploration that is personalized, dialogic, and respectful, appreciating the fact that what might be coming for the unchurched is nothing short of a radical personal transformation: new life in Christ.

The significance of these findings lies in the priority placed on reclaiming a first-century ministry for twenty-first-century practice. In the present milieu, in which a person coming across as certain (translated as rigid, dogmatic, and judgmental by the prevailing culture) is often rejected, the commitment to follow Christ's last command requires courage. It is perhaps a lack of courage that has muted the effects of traditional teaching so far. This thesis is offered with the hope that pastors, church leaders, and teachers would be willing to step out onto the strong foundation that undergirds a call to missional teaching.

As presented in this paper, the Church and its leaders should see themselves differently and act accordingly. Congregations previously self-identified as dispensers of goods and services should become sending congregations whose primary ministry is to produce disciples who can make new disciples but not necessarily new church members. Small groups cocooned for safety within the congregation should adopt a vision of missional community that incarnates Christ and his Kingdom in neighborhood third places. And individual Christians seeking spiritual growth for themselves should consider their role as missional teachers. As their spiritual journeys upward, inward, among, and outward progress, so too will their willingness to strike up an informative conversation with the unchurched, de-churched, or religiously allergic take hold.

It is, therefore, strategically important for Fuller Northern California to equip future ministers of the Church for missional teaching, especially in the San Francisco Bay

Area. A set of priorities and learning objectives was outlined for Fuller students, and these can be accomplished if all seminary professors reexamine their academic disciplines in light of the Great Commission. Fuller—well respected for its traditional teaching framework—need not fear obsolescence, but should be heartened by the finding that students with the greatest theological clarity are also much more able to engage in spirited discussion with the religiously hostile. To the degree that classes foster theological reflection through the missional lens, vigorous active learning, and application to real life, students will gain the practice and confidence for informative conversation at Starbucks. The natural way to monitor the progress of students is by enhancing the apprenticing (mentoring) that takes place in fulfillment of seminary requirements to include periodic evaluation of missional aptitude and the ministry skills needed for full engagement with the unchurched, de-churched and spiritually allergic.

The consequences of not activating missional teaching, either through congregation-sent missional communities or through Fuller students, are serious. The world suffers consequences if the Church abdicates its responsibility to make disciples by means of teaching: biblical illiteracy is inevitable and the resulting ignorance deprives people of the opportunity to understand and trust in Christ, and people who reject the gospel have done so without a complete or accurate picture of what is offered. At the very least, Christian disciples should care that people's decision to believe (or not) is based on real information, not hearsay or idle speculation.

The Church that withholds missional teaching stands to neglect one of its prime reasons for being, depriving its neighbors and the nations of explanations that may catalyze their conversion. When missional teaching is not part of the disciple-making

process, there is no way to shape disciplined and discerning thinking about Christianity. In today's world it is imperative that those considering Christ and the faith be taught how to reflect biblically and theologically, even before their conversion. Otherwise, as they continue their faith journey in the pluralistic Bay Area, for instance, they may be buffeted by the winds of strange doctrine and confused to the point of doubt or disbelief. Without the help of a missional teacher, these newest disciples may experience an erosion of orthodoxy and perhaps not even realize that it has happened. On a grander scale, the Church that loses touch with God's Story and how it relates to the cries of the human heart is more likely to break the apostolic chain Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 15:3: "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received." If the Church does not deliver what it has received, where else are people to go to find the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6)? As Simon Peter said, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68).

APPENDIX A

Membership Statistics for Three Bay Area Presbyterian Churches

Source: PCUSA General Assembly Council, Research Services

First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California

YEAR	CHURCH	MEMBER-SHIP as of 12/31/YY	ADULT PROF OF FAITH (includes baptisms)	CERTS OF TRANSFER from other churches	ADULT BAPT ONLY	MIXED C.E. ENROLL	WORSHIP ATTEND (AVG)
2009	FIRST, CONCORD	311	4	5	1	182	227
2008	FIRST, CONCORD	327	4	4	0	177	228
2007	FIRST, CONCORD	349	10	11	3	215	241
2006	FIRST, CONCORD	354	7	3	0	218	236
2005	FIRST, CONCORD	372	12	6	5	132	246
2004	FIRST, CONCORD	400	9	9	2	111	248
2003	FIRST, CONCORD	402	17	0	0	218	263
2002	FIRST, CONCORD	424	5	4	0	240	281
2001	FIRST, CONCORD	493	5	10	0	268	305
2000	FIRST, CONCORD	512	7	8		353	316
1999	FIRST, CONCORD	531	16	16	7	144	302
1998	FIRST, CONCORD	522	0	14	1	47	284
1997	FIRST, CONCORD	518	25	8	5	228	295
1996	FIRST, CONCORD	576	22	9	1	125	343
1995	FIRST, CONCORD	623	19	8	2	134	395
1994	FIRST, CONCORD	799	0	0	0	0	0
1993	FIRST, CONCORD	799	28	16	0	131	0
1992	FIRST, CONCORD	849	14	2	2	166	381
1991	FIRST, CONCORD	1,001		9	0	167	492
1990	FIRST, CONCORD	1,067		15	1	306	530
1989	FIRST, CONCORD	1,069		12	4	397	
1988	FIRST, CONCORD	1,080		20	7	320	
1987	FIRST, CONCORD	1,123		27	2	232	
1986	FIRST, CONCORD	1,158		25	12	512	
1985	FIRST, CONCORD	1,142		37	20	354	
1984	FIRST, CONCORD	1,110		31	8	215	
1983	FIRST, CONCORD	1,096		32	4	340	

Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, Menlo Park, California

YEAR	CHURCH	MEMBER-SHIP as of 12/31/YY	ADULT PROF OF FAITH (includes baptisms)	CERTS OF TRANSFER from other churches	ADULT BAPT ONLY	MIXED C.E. ENROLL	WORSHIP ATTEND (AVG)
2009	MENLO PARK	4,009	0	34	120	2,372	0
2008	MENLO PARK	3,915	110	21	2	2,197	3,350
2007	MENLO PARK	4,503	0	48	9	2,579	3,300
2006	MENLO PARK	4,704	0	49	11	2,907	3,200
2005	MENLO PARK	4,577	0	0	0	0	0
2004	MENLO PARK	4,577	0	0	0	0	0
2003	MENLO PARK	4,577	133	36	0	3,511	3,708
2002	MENLO PARK	4,560	147	64	24	3,863	3,936
2001	MENLO PARK	4,599	185	49	0	2,797	0
2000	MENLO PARK	4,811	189	48	24	1,630	4,000
1999	MENLO PARK	4,653	117	46	0	0	0
1998	MENLO PARK	4,996	249	89	38	4,220	0
1997	MENLO PARK	4,858	162	29	7	3,573	3,382
1996	MENLO PARK	4,890	231	64	26	2,569	3,214
1995	MENLO PARK	4,809	166	44	22	1,620	3,427
1994	MENLO PARK	4,826	121	54	16	2,243	3,569
1993	MENLO PARK	4,526	211	75	24	3,604	3,395
1992	MENLO PARK	4,577	297	104	31	2,886	3,579
1991	MENLO PARK	4,440		101	43	2,761	3,407
1990	MENLO PARK	4,464		125	25	2,548	3,320
1989	MENLO PARK	4,091		116	41	4,975	
1988	MENLO PARK	3,745		101	26	4,748	
1987	MENLO PARK	3,747		101	38	2,325	
1986	MENLO PARK	3,830		81	26	1,885	
1985	MENLO PARK	3,948		103	36	2,731	
1984	MENLO PARK	3,807		81	21	783	
1983	MENLO PARK	3,669		103	19	492	

Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church, Moraga, California

YEAR	CHURCH	MEMBER-SHIP as of 12/31/YY	ADULT PROF OF FAITH (includes baptisms)	CERTS OF TRANSFER from other churches	ADULT BAPT ONLY	MIXED C.E. ENROLL	WORSHIP ATTEND (AVG)
2009	MORAGA VALLEY	971	27	8	4	1,305	522
2008	MORAGA VALLEY	966	22	3	4	1,487	526
2007	MORAGA VALLEY	1,057	19	8	3	1,396	547
2006	MORAGA VALLEY	1,169	20	3	1	2,127	576
2005	MORAGA VALLEY	1,174	35	17	4	1,209	615
2004	MORAGA VALLEY	1,146	30	6	0	0	637
2003	MORAGA VALLEY	1,227	35	17	6	2,085	627
2002	MORAGA VALLEY	1,226	42	24	4	1,604	689
2001	MORAGA VALLEY	1,159	83	24	14	1,712	725
2000	MORAGA VALLEY	1,108	48	17	8	1,040	677
1999	MORAGA VALLEY	1,116	32	38	4	788	0
1998	MORAGA VALLEY	1,066	57	18	30	599	697
1997	MORAGA VALLEY	1,017	40	18	5	320	636
1996	MORAGA VALLEY	1,021	75	30	10	489	653
1995	MORAGA VALLEY	929	31	45	1	892	646
1994	MORAGA VALLEY	974	42	36	6	505	30
1993	MORAGA VALLEY	956	64	28	21	528	554
1992	MORAGA VALLEY	898	52	36	3	472	500
1991	MORAGA VALLEY	873		0	0	469	
1990	MORAGA VALLEY	834		12	0	395	470
1989	MORAGA VALLEY	775		36	5	352	
1988	MORAGA VALLEY	747		52	7	257	
1987	MORAGA VALLEY	733		23	15	229	
1986	MORAGA VALLEY	775		57	9	510	
1985	MORAGA VALLEY	672		68	14	175	
1984	MORAGA VALLEY	563		55	10	144	
1983	MORAGA VALLEY	463		29	4	77	

APPENDIX B

CAN WE SEE A MISSIONAL LEADER DEVELOPING AMONG FULLER STUDENTS?

	KNOWING What does/should Fuller teach for INFORMATION?	FEELING What MOTIVATES a Fuller student in ministry?	BEING What TRANSFORMATION should be fostered in emerging missional leaders?	DOING What BEHAVIOR will be result of Fuller’s influence?
In Four Key Relationships	Content Areas	Affective Qualities of Emerging Leader	Learning Objectives: “The student . . .”	Learning Indicators “. . . through . . .”
UPWARD Loving God “Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.”	The Scripture Languages & Exegesis Systematic Theology Spiritual Disciplines	Love and reverence for God Gratitude for salvation Dependence upon God’s grace and forgiveness Humility Sense of ministry call	Maintains personal relationship with Jesus Christ Shows maturing evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit Practices faith as a way of life Cultivates the mind and heart of Christ	Regular worship of God Ongoing exposure to the shaping power of the Word of God Exercise of spiritual disciplines Decision-making based on discernment of “the voice of Jesus” and truth & error
INWARD Loving Myself As a Child of God	Counseling Skills Human Development Family Systems Theory Healing Ministry	Complete acceptance by God’s unconditional love Non-anxiousness Openness to change without fear	Rests in self-acceptance Achieves self-differentiation Releases anxiety and fear Is integrated self—body, mind, spirit & emotions	Self care and Sabbath keeping Psychological health measured by standard psych evaluations Listening Skills

	KNOWING What does/should Fuller teach for INFORMATION?	FEELING What MOTIVATES a Fuller student in ministry?	BEING What TRANSFORMATION should be fostered in emerging missional leaders?	DOING What BEHAVIOR will be result of Fuller's influence?
In Four Key Relationships	Content Areas	Affective Qualities of Emerging Leader	Learning Objectives: "The student . . ."	Learning Indicators "... through . . ."
AMONG Loving Fellow Christians "Beloved, love one another as I have loved you."	Church History Christian Formation and Discipleship Small Groups & Community Building Pastoral Theology Ministry Praxis	Sense of Belonging in the Body of Christ Desire to follow Jesus Love for fellow Christians	Shows capacity for <i>koinonia</i> Makes friends honestly Maintains a servant attitude Makes self available to others Demonstrates a pastoral heart, nurtures faith and cares for souls Listens well, even in "debate" Invites and organizes collaboration of diverse people	Authentic worship in Christian community Honest accountability in small group Sacrificial giving Mentoring disciples Effective preaching/teaching Healthy functioning in conflict situations
OUTWARD Loving Others Who Are in and of the World "Love Your Neighbor"	Evangelism Global Mission Cultural Exegesis Apologetics Ethics Philosophy	Passion for the Lost Compassion for the hurt, harried & helpless Outrage over injustice Patience while people are in process	Possesses apostolic courage Shows incarnational resilience (adaptability) Exercises ministry creativity Suspends judgment while engaging with diversity (low reactivity) Recognizes God at work in culture Maintains proactivity	Identification with one's mission field Happy transitions to new ministry settings Program development to meet local needs Respectful engagement with those who don't know Christ Objective assessment of one's ministry context Leadership instincts

APPENDIX C

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Fuller Cohort students, I am doing some preliminary research to determine the influence Fuller is having on its students. As a starting point for this inquiry, I need the responses of new cohort students and third-year cohort students. Please, if you are willing, complete and return this questionnaire by April 18th, either by snail-mail (which can remain anonymous) or email (contact information below).

Allow about 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire; it will be more helpful to me if you go straight through and don't second-guess yourself (it's also faster). Just be honest, which will be the most valuable contribution of all. Many thanks for your time answering these questions!

The Rev. Mary Naegeli (FNC Adjunct Faculty)
535 Wimbledon Road
Walnut Creek, CA 94598
revmary@mac.com

I. In which Cohort do you participate? 2007 2009 none

How long have you been attending Fuller Northern California?

Approximately how many courses have you taken so far?

How close are you to graduating?

What are your spiritual gifts? With and for whom do you feel called to exercise them?

II. **How much time per week** do you spend, on average, in “transformational reading” of the Scriptures (vs. “peruse to use”)?

In prayer?

Has this changed since you started seminary? How so?

Have your reasons for engaging in Bible reflection and prayer changed since you started seminary?

III. **Briefly describe the neighborhood in which you live** (include socio-economic-ethnic, level of community involvement, type of housing, name of city/town).

What factors went into your decision to live there?

IV. Consider situations in which you find your wishes differing from those of another person. How do you usually respond to such situations? For each pair of statements below, circle the one more characteristic of your own behavior (understanding that in some cases neither statement would be “typical” of you).

1. A. There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.
B. Rather than negotiate the things on which we disagree, I try to stress those things upon which we both agree.
2. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I might try to soothe the other’s feelings and preserve our relationship.
3. A. I try to find a compromise solution.
B. I sometimes sacrifice my own wishes for the wishes of the other person.
4. A. I consistently seek the other’s help on working out a solution.
B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless tensions.
5. A. I try to postpone the issue until I have had some time to think it over.
B. I give up some points in exchange for others.
6. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
B. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
7. A. I feel that differences are not always worth worrying about.
B. I make some effort to get my way.
8. A. I assert my wishes.
B. I try to find a compromise solution.
9. A. I attempt to immediately work through our differences.
B. I try to find a fair combination of gains and losses for both of us.
10. A. I try not to hurt the other’s feelings.
B. I always share the problem with the other person so that we can work it out.

V. Please read the following paragraph from a book published in 2006:

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully. Those of us schooled from infancy in his ways can become desensitized to their horror. . .

It is unfair to attack such an easy target. The God Hypothesis should not stand or fall with its most unlovely instantiation, Yahweh, nor his insipidly opposite Christian Face, ‘Gentle Jesus meek and mild.’ . . . Instead, I shall define the God Hypothesis more defensibly: *there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us.*

This book will advocate an alternative view [to the God Hypothesis above]: *any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution.*”¹

a. What is your **immediate** emotional reaction to this quotation, or any part of it?

b. Re-read the quotation, and put in your own words a summary (or condensation) of the writer’s basic point(s).

c. How would you respond if someone said this to you in a Starbucks conversation?

¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 31.

PM514: THE MISSIONAL CHURCH AND LEADERSHIP. Mary Holder Naegeli.

DESCRIPTION: This course explores the dynamics of change required in church and leadership to implement ministry that is externally focused, people developing, and Kingdom-based. Working from a biblical theology of the Church and the Kingdom of God, we build bridges to culture, current church forms, and innovations in ministry to the world (local and global). Students engage the world through podcasts and coffee-shop visits and gain skills needed to seize teachable moments with the “de-churched.” By the end of the course, students should have a realistic idea of their own missional aptitude and be thoroughly infected with the “missional virus” that motivates a life-long cooperation with God’s purposes for the church in the world.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR LIFE AND MINISTRY: The ability to discern the movement of the Spirit through periods of discontinuous change in the church landscape remains a critical skill for pastors and church leaders. This course will help students assess the current state of the American and global church and culture through the lens of the theology of church and the Kingdom of God, and learn how to make local ministry decisions in line with a biblical, missional calling.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Students completing this course will have demonstrated (1) an understanding of God’s mission, the nature of the Kingdom of God, and our role as God’s mission partners, from a biblical, theological, and historical perspective; (2) a holy dissatisfaction with the church’s response to shifts in American culture and the challenges of post-modernism, through its leadership, forms and programs; (3) ability to identify missional aptitude and willingness to undergo personal change in order to respond to God’s mandate for mission; (4) skill in engaging the religiously allergic in meaningful learning experiences in “third places” as practice for incarnational ministry; and (5) creativity in the design of a missional leadership project which either transforms an existing ministry or establishes a new one with missional focus.

COURSE FORMAT: This course will meet three hours weekly for a total of 30 hours. The course will employ lecture and class discussion, with various learning activities outside of class time.

REQUIRED READING :

- Hirsch, Alan. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006. ISBN 978-1-58743-164-7. 286 pages, paperback.
- McNeal, Reggie. *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009. ISBN 978-0-4702-4344-2. 224 pages, hardbound.
- Staub, Dick. *The Culturally Savvy Christian*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007. ISBN 978-0-470-34403-3. 201 pages, paperback.
- PLUS ONE BOOK from the Recommended Reading list.

ASSIGNMENTS (totaling 100 points):

1. Read three “required” books plus one “recommended” book, and write a 2 page 4-MAT paper on each (16 points). The books are to be read in the following order: Hirsch, Staub, McNeal, book of choice.
2. Spend 2 hours (in 60-minute minimum blocks) observing and engaging patrons at coffee shop or other “third place,” and log (6 points).
3. Journal “close encounters of a missional kind” for each coffee shop visit (submitted in two installments for 9 points total).
4. Listen to 2 hours of podcasts from your choice of NPR programs—*This American Life*, *Speaking of Faith*, or *This I Believe*—and log (4 points).
5. Write a 5-page personal missional leadership assessment paper (20 points).
6. Write a 20-page final “missional leadership” project (30 points).
7. Class Attendance and participation—.5 point for each 1-hour block of class (15 points).

PREREQUISITES: None. FINAL EXAM: None.

RELATIONSHIP TO CURRICULUM: MDiv: MIN6; MAT / BS / PM: MINF; MACL: Leadership

This ECD is a reliable guide to the course design but is subject to modification.

(3/10)

RECOMMENDED READING LIST (as it will appear in the syllabus):

Creps, Earl. *Off-Road Disciplines: Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006. ISBN 978-0-7879-8520-2. 186 pages, hardcover.

Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003. ISBN 978-1-8768-2587-4. 230 pages, paperback.

Kotter, John P. and Dan S. Cohen. *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002. ISBN 978-1-57851-254-6. 185 pages, hardcover.

McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future. Six Tough Questions for the Church*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003. ISBN 978-0-7879-6568-6. 148 pages, hardcover.

Minatrea, Milfred. *Shaped by God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. ISBN 978-0-7879-7111-3. 194 pages, hardcover.

Roxburgh, Alan J. and Fred Romanuk. *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. A Leadership Network Publication. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006. ISBN 978-0-7879-8325-3. 206 pages, hardcover.

Walsh, Brian J. and Sylvia C. Keesmaat. *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004. ISBN 978-0-8308-2738-1. 233 pages, paperback.

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