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WHEN THE PAST MEETS THE PRESENT:

**REFRAMING LEADERSHIP PARADIGMS
THROUGH THE LENS OF DISCIPLESHIP,
STEWARDSHIP AND COVENANT**

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**WHEN THE PAST MEETS THE PRESENT:
REFRAMING LEADERSHIP PARADIGMS
THROUGH THE LENS OF DISCIPLESHIP,
STEWARDSHIP AND COVENANT**

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of
Perkins School of Theology
in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree
of
Doctor of Ministry

By

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Abstract

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The field of research concerning leadership has been undertaken in earnest for approximately one hundred years. More recently, sub-fields of leadership research have emerged focusing on specific aspects or perspectives of leadership. Understanding servant-leadership, the distinction between technical and adaptive leadership, and positional leadership have led to a more conscious awareness of the role leadership occupies in our everyday life. But the relatively recent focus on leadership and its development does not mean there has not existed both the presence of leaders and mechanisms by which such development might emerge.

While contemporary study might capture the zeitgeist of modern society, there remains potential to neglect methodologies that have existed throughout history. Further, the opportunity for competing values between an organization/leader and its constituents/follower threaten to either derail efforts or create a dualistic dynamic in the leader/follower relationship.

The focus of this work seeks to demonstrate the necessity of common purpose inherent in the leader/follower relationship. As a result, the expectations that the institution (in this case the church) lays out for the constituent (baptized followers of Jesus) apply then to the institution itself as they do to the individual disciple, thereby serving as an incubator of development that would be understood contemporarily as leadership development. Exploring some basic attributes of discipleship, coupled with an expanded vision of stewardship, a paradigm for leadership development becomes evident which has existed within the church for centuries if not longer. The practice of covenant helps to provide a means of both accountability for leader and follower as well as a vested interest in mutual discipleship development. Utilizing examples from the wealth of biblical material regarding shepherds, models emerge for the responsibilities and roles of leaders/institutions as well as followers/disciples. In the case of this work, the measure by which all efforts are tested lie within the mandate Jesus gave his disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel, the Great Commission.

Similar to the dynamic nature of contemporary leadership research, this study seeks to provide a platform by which adaptations might be made specific to a particular context. Rather than simply subscribe to a one-size-fits-all model, discipleship needs to encounter the community in which it seeks to impact. By fully recognizing and appreciating such contextual uniqueness, while adhering to the divine instruction of making disciples of all nations, the church has the opportunity to reassert itself as a primary influence in its community rather than the other way around.

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Where Do We Begin?

John Robert Wooden might not be a household name in every home, but he is surely known among those who follow the history and heritage of college athletics. Regardless of whether one was a casual fan or a fervent disciple of the game, John Wooden continues to be regarded as one of the most revered and successful coaches of all time. The ten NCAA titles his UCLA Bruins claimed over a twelve-year period are believed to be an unbreakable record for Division I men's college basketball. Additionally, as a college player himself at the University of Purdue, he distinguished himself as the first three time All-American. Prior to the end of his coaching career, Wooden became the very first person to be inducted to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame as both a player and a coach. By most measures, the combination of his coaching career with his individual playing career epitomizes the apex of success in his field. But this is not how his former players, nor the man himself, understood his primary role in the lives of the young men he impacted over the 27 years at UCLA and throughout his career.¹ Instead, Coach Wooden understood that basketball - like the classroom, a choral group, or the church itself – could be a laboratory of learning for living out one's faith. In the book *They Call Me Coach*, Wooden states, "I have always tried to make it clear that basketball is not the ultimate. It is of small importance in comparison to the total life we live. There is only one kind of life that truly wins, and that is the one that places faith in the hands of the Savior."²

¹ John Wooden and Jack Tobin, *They Call Me Coach* (San Francisco: McGraw Hill Companies, 2004)

² Ibid.

Today, we might recognize the lessons and instruction offered by practitioners like John Wooden as leadership development, sometimes with a spiritual element interjected. It would be a common sight in the library of any head of an organization, educator, business executive or clergy person to see a variety of literature spanning the topic of leadership. Some titles address the issue from a more general perspective, while still others attempt to address unique circumstances found in specific settings like the church or corporate environment.

Commonality can be found in conversation among students of leadership development. Often, the focus centers on definitions of the term leadership which then leads to a listing of characteristics that support or provide description for the preceding definition. In some cases, it might be evident that circular logic is being employed creating a self-serving concept of leadership benefiting those institutions and organizations more than the constituents they seek to serve. What seems to get lost in the shuffle is what might be seen as a basic function of leadership – to create new leaders.

Information on the topic of leadership abounds in our current environment. Conferences marketed to broad or specific audiences are offered ad nauseum. Consultants are ever willing to provide assessment on the individual or corporate level - at market value of course. Entire schools of leadership are offered in the most hallowed halls of academia in the pursuit of leadership enlightenment! And the general populace is always present to offer their evaluation of all leadership absent the repercussions of being held accountable for their own “arm-chair quarterback/coach” decisions.

All of this is to say that there is no lack of material available on the subject at hand. And yet, it seems self-evident that the subject is far from being mastered given the myriad of positions and schools of thought. Depending on the perspective from which the subject at hand

is viewed, there might be a number of ways in which we might begin to approach the study for this particular work. One might simply review the most common literature of the day and attempt to create a synthesis of different popular models and descriptions for use in a particular setting. Another approach might be to find a specific model that best fits the particular setting to employ with aspirational hopes of perfecting utilization to better anticipate and determine outcomes. And yet a more ambitious approach might be to attempt and create from scratch a model unique to the needs and desired outcomes of a particular organization or institution complete with specific values and characteristics.

A fundamental problem presents itself when trying to put these lessons into practice though...at least with respect to the ecclesial setting. For the majority of prescriptive models of leadership development, they simply fall short of the needs of the church and its constituents. This is not to say that they don't offer helpful information or remedies to some of the struggles all organizations experience, specifically in a Western context. Instead, they offer tools and resources for strategy and tactics in order to accomplish the overall objective, or mission. For instance, L. Gregory Jones invites us to consider that innovation is needed at all levels "because we know that we are facing problems that are "complex", problems that are "wicked"."³ Jones goes on to make the distinction that the challenges being faced today are more difficult than those that are simply "complicated" or "hard."⁴ While innovation is undoubtedly needed, it would be a mistake to assume that this alone might be capable of bearing the heavy weight of complete leadership development. Rather, this is one of many tools and attributes that are employed and realized in the as a result of effective leadership.

³ L. Gregory Jones. *Christian Social Innovation: Renewing Wesleyan Witness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016).

⁴ Ibid.

There should be great care given to the premise that there is a lack of options in the ecclesial toolbox that could – and should – be utilized to more effectively address the topic of leadership development for ecclesial purposes. Instead, one might argue that it is in the ecclesial canon that the most effective and highest potential models are offered. Evidence for such a claim might simply rest in the profound impact and influence that Christianity has experienced and enjoyed globally over the past two millennia.

Of course, the converse of that statement might also be raised given the waning, and too often distorted, role the Christian faith has had in terms of impact in increasing fashion across the world. Whole continents that once served as bastions for the promulgation of the Christian faith have, in relatively recent times, ceased to overtly identify as being guided by any sense of values derived from the Christian canon. Competing value systems appear to gain traction, though it is not always clear from whence these values emerge from in a foundational sense. What we seem to be left with is the handwringing, finger-pointing and gnashing of teeth reminiscent of the grandiose narratives found in the Old Testament preparing for the judgement of God.

One goal of this work will be to explore models of leadership offered in the biblical text – notably the imagery of the shepherd. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the role of shepherd can on one hand be received as simply a part of the backdrop for which the biblical narrative unfolds. A more careful analysis uncovers the rich heritage and significance the shepherd holds in the Hebrew culture which carries forward though the advent of Jesus. Without doubt, that same influence not only shapes, but seems to dictate the role of leadership at all levels of ecclesial leadership, drawing from the lessons and failures of prominent “shepherds” along the biblical timeline.

The image and impact of the shepherd throughout the biblical narrative serves not only as an example of leadership, but also of management. In a spiritual sense, this experienced management might be understood as stewardship. Stewardship in this instance goes beyond the simple measure of our finances. Within the Wesleyan theological framework familiar to Methodists and Wesleyans worldwide, this would be evident in John Wesley's instruction and guidance in social responsibility. The sermon *The Use of Money*⁵ offers what seems on the surface to be simply practical guidance in personal finance. Wesley's three distinct instructions – to earn all you can, to save all you can, and to give all you can - provide a framework by which one might faithfully participate in the economy of God. If followed, the practice appears to benefit both the individual and the community. The undergirding premise of such instruction is much more profound though. If taken in conjunction with other teachings, Wesley's guidance, along with countless others, offers a vision of social responsibility that incorporates the bounty of God's creation with the ultimate mission of God, the *mission Dei*.

The manner by which this understanding of stewardship is given boundary and condition is through the age-old practice of covenant between God and his people. Throughout the biblical narrative until today, covenant has offered and expected the potential for impact beyond oneself. Instead, through mutuality and common purpose, the capability to achieve and see beyond oneself exists in the full experience of covenantal life.

This work intends to build upon the concepts of covenant, stewardship and discipleship in the pursuit of practical leadership development. The unique perspective of this work centers around applying those same concepts to the institutions themselves, rather than simply holding individuals accountable. The thesis being pursued in this work contends that in fact those same

⁵ Outler, Albert, ed. *John Wesley - A Library of Protestant Thought Collection* (New York: Oxford Press: 1964), pgs. 238-250

concepts are not only applicable, but correctly assumed if in fact the church is going to have maximum impact in achieving its stated mission, its purpose for being. To take discipleship then a step further, the position taken in this paper asserts that this same practice of discipleship (as a leadership development methodology) is appropriately experienced beyond the bounds of the church to include the entirety of creation.

To Begin With: Leader, Disciple, and Steward

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

In 2008, Bishop Max Whitfield commissioned a group of lay and clergy leaders from the New Mexico Annual Conference with the amorphous task of leadership development.⁶ His actions were the result of conversations with people recognized as leaders in the conference spanning many years. During these conversations, it was determined that there was a severe lack of upcoming leadership among both the laity and the clergy. Additionally, there was concern that the failure to be deliberate about cultivating effective and faithful leadership would have dire consequences for individuals, the local church, and the conference in the years to come if not properly addressed with a sense of urgency.

Similar sentiments were, and continue to be, shared across all industries and professions. Corporate board rooms, institutions of higher learning, and non-profit organizations desperately seek the next model to move the needle forward for their organizations. The church is no different.

Regardless of setting, there is a distinction that is often overlooked with respect to leadership that must be addressed. While it might not seem significant at first glance, there is an important difference between *leader* development and *leadership* development. “Leader

⁶ Leadership Initiative for Transformation (L.I.F.T.) was created in the fall of 2008. It existed as a guiding entity for wide ranging leadership development for New Mexico Annual Conference. It operated and drove innovation in the conference for five years before being integrated into the Office of the Provost for the New Mexico Annual Conference.

development refers to the nurturing of individual-level skills and abilities, recognized as the building of human capital.”⁷ Without delving too deeply into the nature versus nurture argument surrounding leadership, there is no doubt that some attributes can be both acquired and improved upon with effort. Among others, these attributes might include education, specialized training, natural and cultivated abilities, education and experience (work and life).

“Leadership development, on the other hand, involves building the organization and its members capabilities,” according to an analysis of the two concepts by Shelly McCallum and David O’Connell.⁸ Leadership development supposes that there is a cumulative effect of building the capacities of organizations as well as the individuals who make up the organization. “As such, leadership development builds social capital through an integrative approach.”⁹ McCallum and O’Connell draw upon the earlier work of David Day in exploring the unique relationship between leader and leadership development. While there is a wealth of information to be mined from both sources, for the purposes of this work, it will suffice to draw attention to a few of the distinguishing markers that help to illuminate this integrative approach. According to Day, it serves to “[help] people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives.”¹⁰

“In the case of leader development, the emphasis typically is on individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with formal leadership roles.”¹¹ In this case, such development is focused on human capital of the self. The model then employed in such a

⁷Day, David V. "Leadership Development: A Review in Context." *Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 11, 2001: 581-613.

⁸ McCallum Shelly; O’Connell, David. “Social Capital and Leadership Development: Building Stronger Leadership Through Enhanced Relational Skills”, *Leadership & Organizational Development Journal*, vol. 30, Issue 2, (2009).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ (Day 2001)

¹¹ Ibid.

paradigm is individually focused. That is to say, the competencies acquired are focused on the development of the individual for primarily personal benefit, and secondarily for the benefit others. Such competencies might include knowledge, trustworthiness, and personal knowledge that benefit the individual first, and organizational efforts second. As Day illustrates, these competencies produce skill sets that are at least initially focused on self. These skills fall into three categories: self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation. Within these categories then fall a variety of possible skills honed over time. Self-awareness includes emotional awareness, self-confidence, and an accurate self-image of oneself. Likewise, the competencies of self-regulation and self-motivation are the product of skills including, but not limited to, self-control, personal responsibility, adaptability, initiative, commitment, and optimism.¹²

If in fact, the primary aim of leader development is on the individual, leadership development then has a much broader purpose, namely that of organizational (or institutional) development. With such a shift in perspective, skills and competencies must necessarily shift as well. Rather than a focus on human capital, leadership development seeks to develop social capital as its ultimate aim. Such a model necessitates then that it must be relational in nature. Given this orientation, the competencies and skills need to be adjusted as well. The obvious distinction can be witnessed in the focus of the skills and competencies. Whereas *leader development* tends toward *intrapersonal* competencies (self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation), *leadership development* trends toward *interpersonal* competencies. Broad categories might include social awareness (i.e., empathy, service orientation and political breadth) and social skills (i.e., building strong relationships, team orientation, change catalyst and conflict management).¹³

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

For the purposes of this work, the intention throughout will be to focus on *leadership development*. While such an institutional view of leadership is the goal, it would be naïve to neglect the necessity of individual leaders. In truth, as was already pointed out, a focus on leadership development already presupposes the development of competencies of its constituent members.¹⁴ Likewise, while it might seem patently obvious, recognition of two other groupings of people must be noted in relationship with leaders and leadership: those who “follow” and those who serve as “managers” in such systems. In any sustainable system, all three parties must coexist, where individuals and organizations might occupy different roles within the system at any given time depending on the circumstances. John Wooden pointed out often to his teams that in order to be a “good” leader, one must first be a good follower. Wooden further asserted that understanding one’s role at any given time as either leader or follower was a matter of managing oneself.¹⁵

In order then to undertake such a study of leadership development, several key terms and concepts must be adequately defined for congruence. As is the case with all endeavors, lack of clear communication (a key element and characteristic often associated with leadership) and differing perspectives regarding foundational aspects of any model lead to an opaque view of the future. In other words, failure to have a shared understanding of key terms and concepts doom the development, implementation, and ultimately the overall mission from the onset.

This work will not seek to offer a new definition of leadership specifically, as the landscape is full of serviceable descriptions and anecdotes to describe leadership. Given the focus of this work deals with leadership from an ecclesial perspective specifically, it does

¹⁴ (McCallum and O’Connell 2009)

¹⁵ Wooden, John and Jay Carty. *Coach Wooden’s Pyramid of Success*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell Publishers, 2005) Kindle edition published 2014.

become necessary to explore different questions surrounding the role of leadership as it applies in that particular setting. To the point, our understanding of the concept of leadership will be centered on a few basic, but fundamental questions. Who, or what, constitutes a leader (or leadership) in the church? What is the role and function of leadership in the church? How is leadership observed, measured, and built upon? What is the methodology by which leadership traits and training are conveyed to others? Lastly, what does leadership – from an ecclesial perspective – look like when deployed outside the walls of the church?

The answers to these questions depend to some degree on our definition and understanding of several key concepts. Among those to explore would be leadership, discipleship, and stewardship. Rather than attempting to create wholly new systems and definitions, paying closer to attention to the function of each of these areas serves the purpose of this work more effectively. Ultimately, exploring the functions of these particular concepts will guide the work to more of a systematic approach rather than a developmental program.

Leadership Paradigms

In early conversations with Bishop Whitfield, the question was posed seeking what exactly the end goal was for the group of leaders tasked with ultimately developing new leaders in the New Mexico Annual Conference. What was the stated purpose of this gathering of recognized leaders whose time and energy was so valuable? Was there some sort of program offering that was expected? What did the archetype of leadership look like in the eyes of the Bishop (the obvious positional leader for the annual conference as well as a recognized servant-leader in his own right)? This last question, offered to give an indication as to direction, seemed

to be a sticking point between the Bishop and the one posing the question.¹⁶ In fact, there was significant discussion centered around whether there was an agreed upon form of leadership seeking to be attained, or was personal preference and understanding of particular leadership characteristics the ultimate goal.

The early discussions among the members of L.I.F.T. (Leadership Initiative for Transformation) demonstrated that the entire group would struggle with the very same questions asked of Bishop Whitfield. With no clearly understood mandate as to direction, the opportunity to progress as the group deemed necessary was wide open. The only clear information the group had was a problem statement to be addressed: there was a lack of current and future leadership deemed effective for leading the local churches and entities of the New Mexico Annual conference into a fruitful future.

For the first several monthly meetings, the group met each time for a full day or more pouring over the latest publications, workshops and observed best practices to articulate a corporate vision of L.I.F.T. and its work. Out of those early brainstorming sessions, a picture began to emerge. Lists of characteristics describing leadership qualities were constantly being updated. Best practices in leadership workshops were recalled and put forth as possible frameworks for L.I.F.T. What remained elusive though for the entire group was an agreed upon working definition of leadership. Instead, the group – like much of the prescriptive literature surrounding leadership available today – all too often opted to rely on anecdotal evidence centered more on descriptors than substance. It was painfully obvious that more deductive work would be needed to settle on agreed upon parameters that would guide the aspirational efforts of

¹⁶ The author of this work, Todd Salzwedel.

L.I.F.T. The group diligently explored contemporary options for inspiration. One such opportunity presented itself at the Willow Creek Leadership Summit.

Jack Welch, during a 2010 interview with Bill Hybels¹⁷, was asked to detail some of the leadership lessons he learned during his storied career as the CEO of GE. Key terms like “success”, “vision”, and “leadership” were peppered throughout the conversation. Early on, the two men spoke at length about how success was both understood and more importantly, achieved. Interestingly, Welch spoke in very candid terms about how he measured success early on in his career versus later in life. To be sure, in his industry, the goal (or mission in church parlance) was to create and manage a profitable company to increase revenue for investors and shareholders. Welch stated that this became his primary driver for how he measured success...the all-important bottom line.

Understandably, this strong focus on an articulated and measurable goal drove his practice and scope for what leadership entailed. As both men wove through the conversation, it was clear that “laser-focus”¹⁸ dictated the actions of Welch as both the positional and actual leader of GE. For instance, Jack Welch was infamous for his practice of annually firing the bottom ten percent of managers in terms of productivity. While Welch acknowledged to Hybels that he was heavily criticized for his policy regarding relatively underperforming managers, his desired outcome was to create a highly competitive environment by which individuals would be motivated to produce at the highest levels possible as measured against their peers. Interestingly, as Welch promoted this controversial leadership strategy amid his own company, he was careful to note that people were the most important commodity in terms of success into the future for

¹⁷ Global Leadership Summit (2010). Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Illinois.

¹⁸ A term associated with leadership and used as a means to describe the intentional decision making and actions of an individual or entity often regardless of the consequences and impact towards others

his, or any organization. Understandably, the controversial practice Welch employed coupled with his stated “most important commodity” caused conflict and confusion at times. Clearly, the manner in which Welch understood the adjective *important* referred to the contribution an individual was making to the corporate bottom line. This is not to say that Welch did not care about people. Instead, Welch was upfront about the primary manner by which he measured *importance*.¹⁹

While there was not a clear definition of leadership offered during the interview between Jack Welch and Bill Hybels, what was made clear was the positive relationship between leadership (both as a matter of position and practice) and accomplishment of – or adherence to – the stated purpose of any organization. It is this direct relationship of leadership and purpose that most closely reflects the aim of this work for our ecclesial purposes.

An extremely helpful description then is offered by Tod Bolsinger when he states, “leadership is about (an organization) fulfilling its mission and realizing its reason for being.”²⁰ This simple but profound statement helps to articulate an essential relationship that is too often overlooked in present discussions regarding leadership. In some sense, it is obvious that leadership as pertaining simply to an individual is at best incomplete. At worst, such a practice demonstrates a severe lack of concern for anyone or anything beyond self-serving motives. Even when applied to an overall organization, leadership, without meaning or purpose, in and of itself fails to accomplish anything beyond elevating the “leader” above the constituents. This failure can apply equally to an individual leader, or to an institution as leader. Conversely, any robust example of leadership must be understood as a concept by which direction or guidance along a

¹⁹ (Welch 2010)

²⁰ Bolsinger, Tod. *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. (Westmont: Intervarsity Press, 2015). Pg. 21.

certain course is offered while at the same time retaining a clear understanding of the character and purpose of the individual(s)/organization(s) in leadership positions.

Obviously, it is abundantly evident that definitions describing leadership abound. While the varying definitions are helpful, it is the impact that leadership has on its constituents that give it meaning. John Maxwell states that, “Leadership is not about titles, positions, or flowcharts. It is about one life influencing another.”²¹ Maxwell is not the first, nor the last to highlight the relationship between leadership and influence. The consistent recognition of such a relationship demands then that any leadership practitioner pay attention to all parties involved in such functioning paradigms.

Another way of understanding influence might at times be referred to as role-modeling. In this instance, Bill Russell²² offers some helpful insights as to how we might begin to articulate the means by which leadership is both observed and ultimately practiced. Bill Russell, after completing what many regarded as the most successful career in team sports, endeavored to draw upon his experiences and observations to compile the most essential and repeatable lessons on leadership that helped to shape his formation as a human being and as a player. He understood deeply that the measure of success that some might recognize had the potential to be vastly different from others, including himself. Specifically, Russell articulated a deep conviction that “success” in his mind grew far beyond the championships and accolades he had earned. Rather, success was measured by how he utilized the opportunities made available to him as a result of the position he found himself due in part to the success he realized as measured externally.

²¹ John Maxwell, *Sewell Leadership Conference*. Odessa Texas, September 20, 2018.

²² Bill Russell, named the “greatest team player in history” by Sports Illustrated, played thirteen years in the NBA winning 11 championships with the Boston Celtics. As a professional basketball player, Russell spent his last two years as both player and coach. During his college career, Bill Russell played for two national championship teams at the University of San Francisco. Years after his storied playing career came to an end (including playing for the US Olympic team), Russell wrote a series of 11 lessons of leadership, which he entitled *The Russell Rules*. (Russell and Falkner 2001)

Further, Russell was, and has continued to be, cognizant that mere position would not in and of itself be necessarily sufficient to influence others in a meaningful way. He understood that the influence he, or any other leader, might exert needed to serve something greater than simply promoting an individual or organization. Leadership without foundational principles and values tied to a greater vision potentially served only self-promotion.²³

Russell offered an anecdotal story to demonstrate this point. In the late 1990's, Russell was asked to come speak to the NBA's Boston Celtics – the team he both played for and coached during his professional career. At the time, the team was experiencing a great amount of internal turmoil resulting in enduring a losing record on the season. Russell wrote:

*"In 1999, I was asked to speak to the Celtics team, which, at that point, was on a nine-game losing streak and were not playing well as a unit. I began by telling them that despite that so much had been written about me being the most unselfish player, I was the most egotistical player they would ever meet."*²⁴

Russell went on to share that the eager faces of these young superstar players stared back at him eagerly knowing there was more to come. As soon as Russell was confident that he had their full attention, he continued with his lesson. "Do you know the difference between your ego and mine? My ego is not a personal ego, it's a team ego. My ego demands—for myself—the success of my team. My personal achievement became my team achievement."²⁵ Bill Russell

²³ Russell, Bill and David Falkner. *Russell Rules: 11 Lessons on Leadership From the Twentieth Centuries Greatest Winner* (New York: New American Library, a division of Penguin Putnam Inc., 2001) Kindle Edition.

²⁴ www.woodenswisdom.com, vol. 7, issue 457. *Wooden's Wisdom: Leadership Development and Personal Improvement from America's greatest Coaches*. Weekly email subscription.

²⁵ Ibid.

was describing in terms the young talented team would understand a pitfall too many talented people and organizations encounter – the pitfall of pride and self-serving decision making. True leadership though demands more than the advancement of the individual. It demands the good of the organization and its mission.

A common descriptive title for leadership to help guard against such a tendency is that of “servant-leader”. In this sense, the “leader” undertakes the initiative to guide others along a desired path primarily by going before that others might follow. By doing so, the servant leader then fully participates in the desired actions and outcomes – the mission – with the intent that others would follow in due course. Pope Francis is quoted in a homily dated March 28, 2013 in which he said, “[t]his is a symbol, it is a sign.... Washing feet means ‘I am at your service....’ As a priest and as a bishop, I must be at your service.”²⁶ In this way, leadership is not assigned simply due to titles and position, but rather by the outcomes an individual or institution produce, presumably focused on a purpose that transcends the individual and/or institution. In an important manner, the very title “servant-leader” implicitly points to a dramatically different sense of position for the leader. It implies that there is not the necessity for a top-down dynamic. For some, it might convey a sense of what is sometimes described as organic vs. systemic. Still for others, it connotes the potential that leadership might emerge from any variety of people and places as a result of deep commitment to a purpose/mission/vision that in and of itself compels the actions of its adherents. Chris Lowney, in examining the leadership practices of Pope Francis, expands upon this premise further.

²⁶ Lowney, Chris. *Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads: Lessons from the First Jesuit Pope*. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2013), Pg. 41.

“Symbols and words count a lot, but what ultimately counts more are results. As presidential historian James MacGregor Burns once put it, ‘The ultimate test of practical leadership is the realization of intended, real change that meets peoples *enduring* (emphasis added) needs.’ If stories about feet seem too esoteric, Burns focuses on a fundamental question that confronts every leader (and ought to haunt those who can’t pass the test). Great leaders drive changes that meet people’s enduring needs. So, is your leadership primarily serving people’s needs or your own?”²⁷

In some sense, this is contrary to what is often hailed as leadership by way of conventional wisdom. For example, when viewing an organizational chart, it is common to observe a more vertical picture that clearly demonstrates the “chain of command”. While this pictorial representation is helpful, it might be argued that it more closely represents a management structure than it does a leadership paradigm. Too often, leadership and management are understood as synonymous terms and concepts. While rigorous academic work has clearly differentiated the two, in practice, they are commonly confused or conflated. In actuality, both are quite distinct and absolutely necessary. In the ecclesial sense, this work will offer a perspective of management in the succeeding sections. Nevertheless, for most organizational charts, there is an evident positional leader, and the presumed expectation by many is that leadership should primarily originate from the person who occupies that top position.

This understanding of leadership – that is to say, positional leadership – has definite purpose and benefit. Depending on the circumstances, it might offer clear lines of communication and responsibility. This distinction can be helpful in the case of an emergency

²⁷ Ibid, 43.

where time is of the essence and it is crucial to know to whom one must turn in order for decisions to be made quickly. In some respects, the positional chart can be of assistance for understanding at what level particular decisions might be best considered. Position can offer clearly articulated areas of responsibility and levels of authority creating parameters by which individuals or departments might operate. Ultimately, for any organization, positional leadership helps to define and label roles for clarity both within and without an organization.

One of several potential shortcomings for positional leadership though stems from its fundamental structure. When decisions and direction are required, at some point, whoever finds themselves at the top (or center, or whatever position designates as ultimately responsible) sets the purpose and direction. In the strictest sense, such a construct could limit the ability of others within an organization to have true autonomy for decision-making that could affect change unless expressly granted by the one occupying the positional leadership spot. It might then be presumed that the authority granted by such a positional leader would ultimately need to be in the interest of said positional leader. It follows then that such interests would lie along a spectrum spanning total control by the positional leader to an almost *laissez-faire* approach. While it would be irresponsible to assume that every instance of positional leadership would lead to self-serving interests and objectives, it follows that at some point, self-interest and preservation could be a factor in the direction any given organization might pursue. Take for instance any business.

At some level, every business exists to make a profit. While multiple objectives may exist that a particular business might aim to achieve, failure to operate at a profit would shutter the doors in a matter of time. Assuming a governance resembling positional leadership (as well as management), internal and external pressure with respect to profit would inevitably influence

the decisions made and carried out, especially in positions of leadership. When such leaders are responsible to a multitude of priorities - such as corporate values, profit margin, and shareholder interests to name a few – it is inevitable that conflict in the form of competing interests would present itself. This can particularly become the case when the needs of differing priorities require resources that are at odds with other competing priorities. When such occurs, it would be naïve to assume that every positional leader would always operate with the most altruistic of intentions. Instead, it is at least plausible that at times, self-interest of the leader and their personal priorities would outweigh even the most noble of missions/purposes undertaken by any business or organization.

Other possible weaknesses of the positional approach to leadership might include decision-making by parties that might not be best suited to make such decisions based solely on one's position in an organization. Fear of negative consequences from “superiors” in the organizational model when leadership decisions fail to produce preferred results are also plausible. To be sure, both weaknesses and strengths are present in an organizational model. Additionally, it seems to follow that the possibility of actions and decisions that benefit (or at the very least protect) the leader are apt to be the norm rather than the exception.

Given such context, it seems natural then to seek after a mode of leadership that is less dependent on the structure of the organization and its positional leader, and more focused on the mission of the organization itself. It would follow then that the “form” such an organization would take on would be determined by its function, rather than the inverse. Similarly, the actions undertaken by such an organization would be directly related to achieving the goals and aims as articulated in the mission. Leadership in such a construct is just as essential as any other

organization, though it too must undoubtedly take on a different form. One such description might be that of servant-leader.

Research pertaining to the particular area of servant-leadership goes back more than fifty years. In the early days of such research, there was a recognition by those interested in the field of leadership that very little empirical data existed that provided a distinction between various leadership models and theories. An early pioneer and influence in this emerging view of leadership was, and remains, James MacGregor Burns. While noted as a seminal historian with a particular interest in presidential leadership and power, it was his work in the broader field of leadership theory that provided a foundation for the exploration of alternative, and possibly more effective, leadership models. In his groundbreaking work *Leadership*, Burns begins to articulate the distinction between *transactional* and *transformational* leadership.²⁸ Drawing from his observation and research from as far back as World War II, Burns noted that when leadership was mentioned, it often referred to the leader-follower dynamic similar to that observed between officers and their subordinates. His further research into this observation led him to conclude that “leadership” focused solely on the trait and qualities of the officers, neglecting to account for the contributions of those the officers led.²⁹ Characteristics and repeated behaviors were catalogued to determine traits most present among officers. Burns determined that when those traits were exhibited by officers and corresponding reactions from subordinates were noted resulting in preferred behaviors, the interaction was understood as leadership. Burns labeled this form of leadership as “transactional” in that the leader-follower dynamic dictated the relationship and ultimately determined the benefit both parties received as a result. For the follower, they received benefits (i.e. affirmation, promotion, continued employment) from the leader for

²⁸ Burns, J. M. *Leadership* (New York: Harper Row, 1978).

²⁹ Ibid.

diligently following directions. In the case of the leader, the benefit equated to the amassing of power, of which Burns points to the higher potential for misuse and abuse. The transactional leadership model, Burns surmised, resulted in “the leader engaging in actions that may or may not be beneficial for the follower.”³⁰ All too often, Burns noted that for the leader without a strong moral or missional sense, the possibility to willingly sacrifice those they lead for personal gain was an ever-present temptation.

Over time, Burns began to imagine, and ultimately observe, what he determined was a more effective leadership model for the realization of a more corporate vision. He began to envision a more cooperative relationship in the leader-follower dynamic that led to his description of *transformational leadership*. Transformational leadership was defined by Burns as, “the leader and follower acting as a system to assist each other’s improvement in all facets of life. The reward for this action is the *other’s* (emphasis added) gain.”³¹

This mutual regard for the benefit of the other - maybe even at the expense of self - is reminiscent of an interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees. During Jesus’ fateful last week in Jerusalem, the conflicts between Jesus and other influential groups in ancient Jewish society offer a glimpse of the differences between transactional and transformational leadership. Immediately after the Gospel of Matthew records the attempt by the Sadducees to trip Jesus up with questions regarding his interpretation of the law and matters of marriage and the resurrection, the Pharisees took their turn in pressing Jesus. What followed is a poignant example of an opportunity for Jesus as a leader to choose between a transactional or transformational approach to leadership.

³⁰ Farling, Myra L.; Stone, A. Gregory; Winston, Bruce E. “Servant Leadership: Setting the Stage for Empirical Research”. *Journal of Leadership Studies* 6 (July 1999): 49-72.

³¹ Ibid.

“34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.””³²

Several points already addressed in this work can be witnessed in this brief interaction. First, there is a clear sense of purpose in the response of Jesus to love both God and neighbor. This call to action requires active participation and intent on the part of the individual. Likewise, it implicates those in leadership positions as well to hold the systems and social structures present to be accountable to the same measure. In doing so, Jesus appeals to the history and traditions not only of his adversaries, but the common person as well. By making clear reference to the *Shema*³³, Jesus invokes an appeal to something beyond the current question at hand broadening the scope and impact of the presenting issue. In doing so, he purposely refrains from responding in such a way that will profit himself above the needs or benefits of others. Instead, his response is one that will ultimately endure beyond his own earthly life to serve as a guiding

³² Matthew 22:34-40

³³ The *Shema Yisrael* is a statement of faith offered during morning and evening prayer services in the Jewish faith. It is comprised, in part, of scripture references from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41.

tenet for those who would follow him. By definition, his actions provide a transformational moment for both leader and follower.

In this sense, the response of Jesus helps to guide us to another connection in leadership theory. While servant leadership has been briefly addressed already, the correlation between the servant leader and the transformational leader must be explored more deeply. Farling, Stone and Winston reference Robert Greenleaf's 1977 work on servant leadership³⁴ by utilizing his servant leadership definition. They quote, "if one is a servant, either leader or follower, one is always searching, listening, [and] expecting that a better wheel for these times is in the making."³⁵ Farling, et al, correctly surmise that in Greenleaf's view, "natural servants are those who understand they are servants first"³⁶ and leaders second.

In the case of the servant-leader then, position is not assumed to be a pre-requisite. Instead, the servant-leader can emerge from anywhere within (and maybe without) the organization. Due to the fact that the leader need not be in a *position* of authority, it is not always readily apparent who the leader might be at any given time. In truth, it follows that in a servant-leader model, leadership is often shared and dynamic amongst different individuals or groups. This can be attributed to the different needs in pursuit of the larger mission being sought after. Whereas authority within positional leadership is derived from position itself, this dynamic is potentially flipped on its head in the servant-leadership model when it is best realized.³⁷ In such a setting, true leadership then is exemplified through characteristics like integrity, inspiration and creativity, regardless of any type of formal position held while in

³⁴ Greenleaf, R. K. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press. 1977).

³⁵ (Farling, Stone and Winston 1999)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ One note to make here is that in the case of the church, where the institution is often referred to as a living entity comprised of baptized individuals, all are ideally working towards the same mission. Later, this work will explore the role that the church as an institution plays as leader specifically, from a servant-leadership perspective.

pursuit of a greater mission. This reality, when completely applied, has the potential to bear out results limited only by the scope of the mission it seeks to realize.

Let us return then to a broader understanding of leadership. Tod Bolsinger reminds us that “leadership is focused on what can be or what must be.”³⁸ Leadership by its very nature must seek then to visualize beyond what current circumstances and realities present themselves in order to move to a more preferred future. Vision is both necessary and implied in such a conceptual understanding of leadership. Further, leadership is not constrained to either an individual or a corporate body. Instead, as Bolsinger states, “leadership is always about personal *and* corporate transformation.”³⁹ Again, this perspective is only possible though when a purpose/mission beyond individual benefit is present. Such a purpose requires a methodology that by design equips and empowers others to take an active role in its implementation.

Discipleship

Given the nature of this work, it is fitting and necessary to explore the connection between leadership and often-amorphous terms in the church, namely disciple and discipleship. It wouldn't be uncommon on a Sunday morning to hear from the pulpit or a Sunday School lesson the description of a disciple being simply a student or learner. While this is undoubtedly an aspect of what it means to be a disciple, it by no means captures the full scope of what it entails to become a disciple, especially in the context of Christianity.

A more robust understanding of “disciple” uncovers the great depths becoming a disciple requires. It isn't simply a matter of “learning” a set of facts or traditions. It is more than coming

³⁸ (Bolsinger 2015) 21

³⁹ Ibid. 21

to understand a certain school of thought. Becoming a disciple assumes that an entirely new way of life is being pursued. Realized in its fullness, becoming a disciple in a Christian context supposes that one will not only undertake a lifelong quest to acquire the teachings of the Christian faith, but to employ them as a part of one's daily life, in action and in spirit. As a disciple, it is fitting to assume the actions of one's life would reflect that of the "leader", who ultimately is the person of Jesus Christ.

It should be noted though that care must be taken to differentiate between Christian education and spiritual formation versus the answer to Jesus' call to "[c]ome follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."⁴⁰ Formation is undoubtedly an aspect of discipleship, but far from the assumption of such an endeavor. This potential to conflate education/formation with discipleship, as addressed in an interview with Dallas Willard and Richard Foster, helps to illuminate the misunderstanding. Willard, when asked to articulate his use of the phrase *spiritual formation* offered that "spiritual formation is character formation. Everyone gets a spiritual formation. It's like education; it's just a matter of which one you get."⁴¹ This formation, as Willard describes, provides the content for development, but is insufficient for the full and ongoing task of disciple development. Willard expands on this idea further by describing what he observes taking place with respect to institutional formation.

"What sometimes goes on in all sorts of Christian institutions is not formation of people in the character of Christ; it's teaching of outward conformity. You don't get in trouble for not having the character of Christ, but you do if you don't obey the laws.

⁴⁰ Mark 1:17

⁴¹ Agnieszka Tennant, "The Making of the Christian," *Christianity Today* (10 October 2005): 42-44.

It is so important to understand that character formation is not behavior modification. Lots of people misunderstand it and put it in the category of Alcoholics Anonymous. But in spiritual formation, we're not talking about behavior modification.”⁴²

John Wesley provides some insight through which such formation might aid the discipleship journey. In Sermon XVI, Wesley offers what he describes as “means of grace” that guide Christians toward Christlikeness. He describes such actions that sanctify the believer to include words, signs and spiritual actions. Wesley was careful to differentiate between works of piety and those that take place in the broader community. Those works of piety described by Wesley include, but are not limited to, prayer, fasting, reading of the Scriptures, and witnessing to our faith. As to the more communal practices, the observance of the sacraments and corporate worship we also seen as vital.⁴³

For Wesley, the shift from Christian formation to discipleship lay in the power that could only be administered in a divine sense – namely the grace of God. It was through such grace that Wesley understood true faith to be realized. Conversely, by neglecting to discipline oneself to diligently continue with the exercise of such faith, we risk drawing our focus from where it belonged. It is well documented that Wesley feared less that the people called Methodists would continue on after he was gone.⁴⁴ Rather, Wesley feared Methodists would “exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless

⁴² (Tennant, *The Making of the Christian* 2005)

⁴³ John Wesley, Sermon XVI. *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 5, First series of Sermons (1-39). Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002. Pg, 185-201.

⁴⁴ D. A. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990).

they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit and discipline with which they first set out.”⁴⁵ This “dead sect” would be the result then of a move away from personal and communal discipleship.

Dallas Willard gave a more contemporary assessment to address what he understood as a misunderstanding of discipleship in the present day. “In our country, on the theological right, discipleship came to mean training people to win souls. And on the left, it came to mean social action – protesting, serving soup lines, doing social deeds. Both of them left out character formation.”⁴⁶ Willard, among others, makes the case that discipleship is a matter that requires both character formation as well as behavior modification. Much like the relationship between leader and leadership development and its intent to build human and social capital respectively⁴⁷, discipleship as a concept involves the individual as well as the broader community in the work of God.

Stewardship

While much is written and theorized about regarding leadership, it might be easy to assume that leadership in and of itself is sufficient for the realization of a full range of missions. To be sure, leadership is imperative and a concept that continues to be developed personally and corporately. But leadership alone cannot achieve what can or must be without processes and strategies to move the needle. One way of articulating and understanding such processes might be described as management, and in the case of the church, a particularly unique mode of management comes to bear.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 201-202.

⁴⁶ (Tennant, *The Making of the Christian* 2005)

⁴⁷ (McCallum and O'Connell 2009)

There is often confusion as to the difference between leadership and management. Here, Tod Bolsinger again helps shed some guidance when making the differentiation between the two. Where leadership is almost always oriented towards the future, management is concerned with what exists in the present.⁴⁸ It almost self-evident in some sense that in order for there to exist a leader or leaders, there must by definition be followers. What is less self-evident is how such a relationship is defined and carried out. By extension, the relationship of a constituency to a leadership paradigm (i.e. an organization or institution) also requires some administration for its current cultivation as well as its success into the future. In the most basic sense, this mechanism is the definition of management. In the case of the church, a possible way to describe this interaction might be stewardship.

The Apostle Paul, in the twelfth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, articulates a list of gifts that would be evident among the Body of Christ as deployed by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹ These gifts – ranging from the very broad to the very specific – are meant to be employed for the overarching mission of the church universal. Whether an individual exhibits the gift of the common good or the interpretation of tongues, how those gifts are deployed and utilized requires a system of management that intentionally pursues the mission of God.

Later in the same chapter, Paul offers us a striking metaphor (individuals all being a part of the same body) of the inter-dependence each person has upon one another in such a system. Paul clearly articulates not only the necessity of each particular gift he lists, but also their interaction with one another and the broader world. It is in this construct that Paul offers a type of positional structure. It might even be interpreted as an organizational chart of sorts.

⁴⁸ (Bolsinger 2015)

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

“²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.”⁵⁰

Referencing again the earlier distinction of *leader* and *leadership* development, there are obvious parallels between the gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit and their utilization in the greater Body. Likewise, there are similar parallels with spiritual/Christian formation and discipleship. In each instance the focus on individual benefit (human capital) is only fully understood in the broader context of the whole (social capital).⁵¹ In other words, within the economy Paul describes the realized gains of both human capital and social capital are most effectively experienced when used in conjunction with one another.

Rather than propose an oppositional or siloed environment among believers Paul concludes 1 Corinthians 12 in this way:

*“²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?
³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.”⁵²*

It is to this end that Paul clearly recognizes the unique makeup and character of individuals within the greater Body. Similarly, he also recognizes – and affirms – the need for

⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:27-28

⁵¹ (McCallum and O'Connell 2009)

⁵² 1 Corinthians 12:29-30

all types of roles and responsibilities. While it could be taken as an organizational type of leadership given the order that Paul lists the different gifts and roles, it might likewise be viewed in an alternate manner. The last verse encourages the reader to “eagerly desire the greater gifts”. Might Paul be stating that by the power of the Holy Spirit coupled with determination, one might continue to grow in to further and further roles of leadership? Might he also be making the case that regardless of where one finds themselves in the list of apostles, prophets and interpreters that leadership is required regardless of role and responsibility? If so, how then does stewardship of who and what we (individually and corporately) are as a gift from God become relevant?

While the last question will be addressed directly in a later chapter, the preceding questions offer up the opportunity to obtain a broader perspective for the allocation of resources made available to the church by God. Rather than assume a more top-down view of importance in either list, there exists the capacity for a more symbiotic relationship among Paul’s listing of gifts and roles. In this way, the church is afforded the opportunity to be a trailblazer in the practice and theory of stewardship as might be realized in a broader communal sense.

Moving Forward

As we transition from this overarching review of concepts and ideas surrounding the ever-evolving role of leaders and leadership, it is important to draw our focus to some of the leading questions that directed the research above. It becomes obvious that the definitions and roles of leader/leadership abound. And yet, most people are aware of when they are in the presence of either whether they can adequately describe it or not. Similarly, the means by which leadership is conveyed and ultimately developed has strong corollaries to discipleship in the

church. Finally, the administration of the resources available (in this case the totality of the church) become a matter of stewardship. It is vital not only how these concepts are understood in theory then, but also how they are put in to practice that leads to the effective realization (or not) of the mission.

The Church as *Lead Disciple*

A popular axiom surrounding the topic of leadership states, “Leadership is about influence.” Many people would maintain that influencing others towards a preferred future is the primary objective of leadership. Ideally, this preferred future paints a picture well beyond what any individual could attain on their own and has the capacity to impact entire systems in a positive sense. There are, it could be argued, multiple other aims for the influence of leadership. While it might seem obvious, some other possible objectives might center around the development of characteristics, values or practices synonymous within the umbrella term of leadership. Most commonly, these attributes are applied to individuals. The thesis being proposed here is that the same criteria can, and should, be applied to the institutions and organizations that exist as leadership – and discipleship – incubators as well. In this way, the “function” of such leadership influence could be understood as a proper mechanism to produce more leaders.

Presumably, the purpose of any objective related to leadership is to promote and advance the mission – either stated or implied. Sometimes the mission of an organization is abundantly evident based on its function. At other times, the mission is not so simply derived. Take for example the business community. At first glance, the mission, if understood as the purpose for existence, might be readily apparent – to create profit for the investors and owners of the company. To be sure, this is not the only function and benefit business provides either it’s employees or its customers. With the growing awareness of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder management (SHM), it is evident that the impact of any business venture

can be evaluated from a variety of perspectives. It has become abundantly evident that corporations around the globe are reassessing their purpose and those they answer to. In dramatic fashion, “[o]n August 19, 2019, the Business Roundtable (BRT)—a group of prominent CEOs of companies, including JPMorgan Chase, Amazon, Apple, and Walmart, among others—released a statement declaring that the purpose of the corporation no longer gives shareholders special consideration, but rather that corporations should serve the interests of all of their stakeholders.”⁵³ This proclamation garnered the attention of the global business community and organizations everywhere. “Maximizing shareholder returns has been an article of faith in business research and practice for decades, so this explicit reversal from the BRT’s earlier Statement (1997) supporting shareholder wealth maximization...”⁵⁴ generated enormous interest especially among organizations who were implicitly concerned with the social good.

Suffice it to say that organization and institutions, like industries, have the undeniable capacity to impact the culture around them. The converse is also true as those same organizations and institutions can be influenced by their constituents. It is entirely conceivable and understandable that the concepts of both positional and servant- (relational) leadership can then be applied in a broader sense to institutions and communities or all types. In the end though, it is the pursuit and realization of the mission, regardless of where that impetus originates, that is of most importance.

In the case of the church, the mission is often stated in colorful language, found on printed materials, reiterated from the pulpit on Sunday mornings, and restated at every small group and committee gathering. At least, this might be the case in the best of circumstances. In

⁵³ Harrison, Jeffrey S; Phillips, Robert A; Freeman, R. Edward. On the 2019 Business Roundtable “Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation”. *Journal of Management* 46 (September 2020): 1223-1237.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

actuality, for many in the ecclesial world, recollections of monthly meetings and “visioning” exercises resulting in carefully worded statements run rampant. For some, the difficult work produced a clear path forward that would guide the actions and efforts of all that would follow. The evidence of such clarity of purpose permeates every aspect of the organization. But for others, it might be a painful reminder of devout work that produced professional glossy materials ready for distribution that would ultimately come to collect dust on the shelf of the pastor’s office. Post-it notes and white boards become symbols of hours of hard work that goes forgotten and relegated to the heap of prior dreams left unrealized

Common practice regarding the development of a mission statement encourages that the statement be succinct and simply relayed to others. It should be catchy and easily understood in terms of intent and audience. The results are often pithy statements that are easy to remember and evoke some emotional response. From a marketing perspective, this approach makes complete sense and proves to be highly effective. What might be debated is whether those same statements actually assist an organization to achieve the desired outcomes they seek. To be sure, a catchy statement or phrase in and of itself is not capable of bearing such heavy work. In order for such purpose to be realized at any level, those responsible for its implementation must become immersed in its value and potential impact. If those who would participate in fulfilling such a mission statement cannot themselves see how preferred and lasting change might possibly be achieved, it is doubtful that there would be much buy-in. And the potential always remains that even amidst such positive conditions, the ultimate vision such a mission seeks after just might not become reality. This phenomenon is not lost on the church.

As a denomination, the United Methodist Church offers a brief synopsis of its purpose, as well as giving some historical context for its basis. It reads:

“The United Methodist Church is a global denomination that opens hearts, opens minds and opens doors through active engagement with our world. The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

John Wesley and the early Methodists placed primary emphasis on Christian living, on putting faith and love into action. This emphasis on what Wesley referred to as "practical divinity" has continued to be a hallmark of United Methodism today.”⁵⁵

The actual mission statement, “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” provides a concise wording of the stated denominational purpose. For most people, this is an obvious truncated version of the Great Commission as given by Jesus to his disciples at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. In its fullness, the Great Commission expands the scope and strength of what the United Methodist mission statement seeks to capture.

“¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ United Methodist Official Webpage. <https://www.umc.org/en/what-we-believe>

⁵⁶ Matthew 28:18-20 – New International Version

Even as a guiding statement for those who would be followers of the Way, the Great Commission is still in some sense a more directive action of an even larger mission at hand – specifically the *missio Dei*. In an article addressing the topic of reconciliation from the contributions of John and Charles Wesley – among others – Paul Wesley Chilcote articulates a vision of “reconciliation and resurrection ...possible for us under the sign of the cross.”⁵⁷ While the process of reconciliation is often presented as a more personal endeavor, the reality is that reconciliation is something that can and should be experienced on a grander scale. Walter Wink, for example, “emphasizes the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation, concepts often blurred in popular Christianity. While forgiveness can be unilateral, true reconciliation requires mutuality.”⁵⁸ In other words, when reconciliation is viewed on the individual or micro level, the power that true reconciling work possesses cannot be accessed. Reconciliation regards systems and peoples as a whole rather than simply on the individual level. Likewise, when the power of resurrection is limited to an individualized experience, it by extension assumes a limit to the redemptive power of Jesus on the cross. Reconciliation, like resurrection, are intended to be experienced and expressed on the macro level, offered to Jew and Gentile alike. Such is the power and mandate found in the Great Commission.

While the theme of reconciliation on a macro level can be found throughout the scriptures, Paul offers a summation that serves as a launching pad for reflection and context. “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”⁵⁹ While this verse captures the intended point, Chilcote adds, “[m]any of Paul's most familiar themes resound in this fifth

⁵⁷ Chilcote, Paul Wesley. “John and Charles Wesley on God in Christ Reconciling”. *Methodist History*, 2009, vol. 47, pg. 132-145. Madison, NJ: United Methodist Church.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:19

chapter: new creation, imputation, the righteousness of God. Here we encounter St. Paul's great manifesto on reconciliation...."⁶⁰ It can be argued that the ministry of reconciliation is the crux of the entire Gospel, and therefore the impetus for the entirety of effort for the church. If it is understood and accepted that Jesus came to reconcile humanity to God through himself, then it follows that the purpose of the church is to carry on this redemptive work through the power demonstrated and made available at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is a mission and purpose that has the capacity and vision to change individual lives (micro) as well as the world as a whole (macro).

This begs the question then as to how such an effort is undertaken. John Wesley suggests in his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament:

“Only the power that makes a world can make a Christian. And when he is so created, the old has passed away--Of their own accord, even as snow in spring. Behold! the present, visible, undeniable change! All things are become new--he has new life, new senses, new faculties, new affections, new appetites, new ideas and conceptions. His whole tenor of action and conversation is new, and he lives, as it were, in a new world. God, men, the whole creation, heaven, earth, and all therein, appear in a new light, and stand related to him in a new manner, since he was created anew in Christ Jesus.”⁶¹

Wesley intimates this new creation in Christ is in reference to the individual. While this appears to be correct, others offer a broader interpretation to encompass the whole of creation.

⁶⁰ (Chilcote 2009 vol.47)

⁶¹ John Wesley, Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, 2 vols. (London: Bowyer, 1755; reprint ed., Salem, OH, 1975): 457-458.

Richard Hays' view - while agreeing with Wesley with respect to God's reconciling work – potentially extends God's reconciliation to the entirety of creation.

“Paul is not merely talking about an individual's subjective experience of renewal through conversion; rather, for Paul *ktisis* ("creation") refers to the whole created order (cf. Rom. 8:18-25). He is proclaiming the apocalyptic message that through the cross God has nullified the kosmos of sin and death and brought a new kosmos into being.”⁶²

The implications of reconciliation on such magnitude have far reaching ramifications. No longer is the act of reconciliation simply relegated to the private spiritual realm between individual and God. Now, the entirety of humanity (and all of creation) must be included in the efforts to be impacted and to participate in the mission of God. Further, this is not a one-sided transaction that can be accomplished through the act of forgiveness but must engage in the mutual work of forgiveness *and* reconciliation. More to the point, Hays further expounds on this idea stating:

“If God is the creator of a whole world who wills ultimately to redeem the whole creation--if the death of Christ was the means whereby "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through

⁶² Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 20. (Hays 1996)

the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20)--then how can the church that is called to bear God's message of reconciliation in an unredeemed world (2 Cor. 5:17-20) scorn or reject people of any race or tongue, whether they are Christians or not? ... the church has the task of embodying "the ministry of reconciliation" in the world."⁶³

Hays statements, when taken at face value, have massive ramifications with respect to how the church understands its mission as well as its role in leadership development. The mutuality clause concerning forgiveness and reconciliation infer that the church bears enormous responsibility with respect to how it cultivates the development of both human capital (leader) and social capital (leadership). In essence, in order for the church to faithfully execute the purpose for which it was instituted – namely the *mission Dei* – it too must exercise and cultivate the qualities it intends to impart to the world. In this fashion, the church then exemplifies the same relationship as the disciple to Christ in seeking to acquire the state of Christlikeness.

⁶³ (Hays 1996) 441.

A Practical Exercise in Mission

Reflecting on becoming president of Fairleigh Dickinson University in 1999, J. Michael Adams wrote, “[i]t’s easy to write a mission statement. The real challenge is to create a *sense* (emphasis added) of mission across the institution.”⁶⁴ Adams was recalling his observations of his most recent academic post. In doing so, he highlighted a common set of obstacles that leaders are faced with every day. As Adams points out, these obstacles are ever more exaggerated in larger and more established institutions. The university, like the church, certainly qualify under these criteria.

Adams writes, “[l]arge systems are inherently resistant to change. Creating a sense of mission, though, requires change.”⁶⁵ In an almost paradoxical sense, positional and actual leaders of such systems are often called upon to be agents of change. By virtue of the very practices that helped create some institutions though, it becomes even more difficult for them to adapt and change over time. Inevitably, some institutions become more concerned with maintaining the status quo, what is known and comfortable. In this state, it becomes ever more difficult to create an impetus for change. And yet, that is exactly what leaders and leadership are compelled to do at their best.

In order to then create such an impetus, leaders – and by extension leadership paradigms – must intentionally cultivate an environment by which change is not recognized as a form of destruction of the present circumstance. Instead, such an environment would recognize such adjustments as a means by which the entire system (i.e. university, organization, church,

⁶⁴ J. Michael Adams. “Who Cares About the Mission? Creating and Leading Through a Meaningful Mission Statement”. *University Business* 11 (2008-03-01): 27.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

creation) might more closely reflect the preferred future (vision) it seeks to lie in to. It goes without saying though that such endeavors are rarely met in their infancy with resounding applause and excitement by the masses.

Charting a New Path

In this section, I want to explore a case study of sorts undertaken at three different churches over the past seven years. It was born of an almost intuitive sense that there was a disconnect between what the church was encouraging its congregants to do and what the institution itself was practicing. Looking back, it was really an attempt to simply try something different. I was growing disappointed and disillusioned with trying to retool and repackage the same ministries and day to day operations of the church while at the same time trying to convince myself and the church that we were seeking after the *imago Dei*.

In retrospect, the genesis of this original study grew from two different perspectives. The first mimicked president Adams' experience at Fairleigh Dickinson University. I was doing my best to meet with as many different interest groups within the church that I could identify when I first arrived at my newest appointment. As is the case in many churches, there was definite overlap of individuals among the various groups that met. While seeking to hear from the various interest groups, it became painfully obvious that there was no coherent purpose binding the multiple ministries of the church together. In fact, it was difficult at times to even classify some of the groups as ministries at all. At best, the plethora of fellowship communities I visited with over the first several months represented the preferences of individuals at the church

measured by the groups they affiliated themselves with. Regardless of motive, from a leadership perspective, the lack of common mission among the community as a whole was unmistakable.

The second grew from a seemingly benign conversation with a new member of the church. James, as we will call him, was asked simply to share with his small group how often he prayed on a weekly basis. James simply said, “I pray once a week.”⁶⁶ His reply was at once comical and enlightening at the same time. Some in the group thought he was downplaying the question. Others exclaimed that his once-a-week prayer must be amazing to happen so infrequently but capable of addressing all of the assumed purposes the other members prayers might encompass. The truth behind his statement was so much more revealing.

James elaborated on his statement revealing that he himself never prayed on his own. He simply did not feel qualified to do so. In a moment of transparency and vulnerability, James said he did not feel worthy of communicating with God on his own, for fear that he would ask the wrong things, pray the wrong words, or fail to have the right intent in his heart. His fears crippled him so much that he was finding himself constantly questioning whether there was anything that God could ever desire or ask of him. His answer to this problem was to pay attention closely in worship to the pastoral prayer and seek to make that prayer his own.

James’s admission, as it turned out, reflected the feelings of many among the groups that I visited over a period of time. Not everyone expressed a reluctance to pray. Some struggled with their study of scripture. Others never felt comfortable in the company of other believers to grow in their knowledge of God and one another. Almost across the board, generosity of finances and service lacked in each of the people visited. Generally, this service and financial lapse stemmed from overcommitment in other areas of their lives, their spiritual

⁶⁶ Conversation during a small group study at a United Methodist Church. The approximate date would be sometime in 2012.

formation and discipleship holding a lower placement of personal priority, or incomplete understanding of an individual's role in the greater Body of Christ. In essence, many people expressed viewpoints that conveyed their belief that their individual efforts and presence made little to no difference for the whole.

The picture I paint is not unique to this particular church or any other congregation for that matter. This same scenario plays out daily in any number of churches. Churches, like the university setting Adams describes, are constituted of a number of people who feel ill prepared to lead in any capacity or are quite content with the current state of circumstances. Frequently, there are “members of churches” that express their discomfort at the possibility that too many other people might be joining *their* church with the potential to drastically change what they came to love in the first place. These same people are often quite comfortable stating that they like the church just the way it is and don't want it to change. Ironically, these are frequently the same people that darken the door of the pastor's office to inquire as to what the pastor is doing to recruit more members – as long as they look and act the way the current constituency expects them to. Efforts to help these members embody a vision beyond what they have cultivated for their comfort is mostly met with great resistance. This can be summarized in some respect in the understanding of the “country club” mentality. Richard Foster highlights certain elements of this attitude pointing out “many Christian institutions have a system by which you find out whether you're in or out. Sometimes it's rules; sometimes it's a certain belief system.”⁶⁷ At the same time, there exist “many great people who are ready to create a new, exciting environment.”⁶⁸ It is to this particular group of people that our case study began its focus.

⁶⁷ (Tennant, *The Making of the Christian* 2005)

⁶⁸ (Adams 2008-03-01, vol. 11)

Like many churches that dot the spiritual landscape, there was plenty of work ahead. First and foremost, I prayerfully began identifying some of the “many great people” who would help to envision and articulate the preferred future we would discern together in order to join in God’s redemptive and reconciling work. Gathering together a group of committed individuals, the at times arduous task of discovering and articulating the purpose for *First Church*⁶⁹ got underway. Much like the efforts of L.I.F.T. described earlier, this body of people spent considerable time early on in prayer and discernment. Initial goals for the group included agreement on definitions of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus (i.e. what constitutes being Christian?) as well as a collective understanding and appreciation for what exactly the church was. Early on in the process, the group latched on to a popular book written by Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger entitled *Simple Church*. They were specifically intrigued by the concept that regardless of how many ministries a specific church participated in, according to the authors, the type of disciple that you desired to produce was paramount for everything.⁷⁰ In essence, Rainer and Geiger proposed that the type of disciple to be produced would dictate not only the process developed but the how the local church would operate on a daily/weekly/monthly/annual basis.

One example from the book, in particular, caught the attention of the group early on due to its simplicity in statement and purpose. Rainer and Geiger described a particular local church (Cross Church) as an example as to how any church body might succinctly understand their guiding purpose. “Cross Church took their desires for disciples and placed them in sequential order: ‘Love God, love others, serve the world.’”⁷¹ This simple progression conveys

⁶⁹ The name is changed for the purposes of this paper. A similar process was undertaken in two subsequent churches with similar conclusions and results as *First Church*.

⁷⁰ Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2006). Kindle Edition.

⁷¹ Ibid.

with it not only a purpose, but a formative process by which Christian formation⁷² and ultimately discipleship might be realized. While the process is not detailed in terms of tactics and specific details as to how this might be accomplished, there was nevertheless an intentional progression of intent for every person involved in the church. The group recognized that this progression allowed for latitude among various ministries to be tactically adaptive in pursuit of the stated and guiding purpose of Cross Church.

Concurrent with reading *Simple Church*, the group was also exploring whether the mission statement of *First Church* captured both the character of the church and its efforts. The long-standing mission statement read, “Making disciples for the transformation of the world”, an obvious derivative of both the Great Commission and the mission statement of the United Methodist Church. As the group contemplated the effectiveness of the mission statement in conjunction with seeking a more simplified manner by which they understood their purpose and process, a different line of questioning emerged. This alternate line of questions centered around the distinction between discipleship of the individual and discipleship as experienced as the institution of the church. In essence, curiosity arose as to whether the church, in terms of role-modeling, was accountable to the same discipleship markers that the group was considering for individual disciples. Characteristics often associated with individual leaders began to be applied to the church as an institution for assessment purposes. Most importantly, the issue of integrity of the church became a priority focus and cause for deep reflection. Primarily, it was the consensus of the group that while the church sought to encourage and empower the development of disciples for Jesus Christ, it was not always evident that the church as an institution was in any deliberate way seeking after the same goal as evidenced by her actions.

⁷² See comments by Dallas Willard and Richard Foster regarding Christian formation and discipleship (Tennant, *The Making of the Christian* 2005)

In essence, there was a revelatory sense that the mission of the church – whatever it might state – applied more to the individuals of the church rather than the institution itself. In a very real manner, the lack of congruity for the expectations of the church and the individual would eventually be seen as dereliction of faith and responsibility on the part of the church itself. This became, for many, abundantly clear when looking at some very particular instances of ministry in the church.

Take for example the almost obligatory annual stewardship campaign. Like the vast array of literature and models for leadership development, there exist an impressive collection of tools and approaches that address the “annual campaign” to resource the ministry of the upcoming year. The fact that annual campaigns almost exclusively address financial stewardship cast an even more glaring light on some inadequacies the group was beginning to recognize. While most of these resources do in fact speak to biblical concepts such as tithing and discipleship, some simply consist of new packaging intended to bring about the result of increased giving both in amount per giving unit as well as the number of giving units. To be sure, many such programs might be viewed by some simply as well produced marketing campaigns masking fundraising in spiritually coded language. Others view such efforts as a means to engage congregants in the mission and ministry of the church in a very faithful manner. Admittedly, how such campaigns and initiatives are received depend greatly on the individual leaders responsible for presenting them to the local congregation. Regardless of perspective though, it can be argued that there are several unintentional messages being relayed.

One such unintentional message originates in the expectations expressed by the stewardship campaign. The potential problem is not with the overall messaging around the biblical concept of tithing. This is one expression of faith by which we honor our understanding

of who we are in God's economy and thus participate in His work to accomplish the *mission Dei*. To be sure, the affirmation that all we have individually and collectively is a gift from God serves a statement of faith and invites active participation rather than passive observation in God's redemptive work. The practice and teaching of generous giving is exemplified throughout the biblical witness and the lives of faithful disciples to this day. The potential problem lies squarely with example found within the institution of the church itself and the limited understanding and teaching regarding stewardship.

Commonly, such a "stewardship" program would entail a series of letters – possibly directed at different levels of giving units – highlighting and promoting ministries the church is currently engaged with or hopes to begin in the future. Positive testimonies and impact stories on the lives of people within the church and in the broader community become sources of celebration for the church's communal work with God. Often taking place during the fall, the program is often accompanied by testimonies offered by consistent givers in the church, sermons focused on the joy of giving and generosity, and culminating in a call to individuals to prayerfully give by faithful – and often sacrificial – ways. Frequently though, there is little mention of other areas of life that we are also called to steward. "Christian stewardship involves the totality of the believer's life--his time, his money, his talents, his energy, his family, his business, his home, etc. When a believer begins to take total stewardship seriously, tithing is seen as only one facet of the Christian's accountability unto God."⁷³

To be clear, there is support for the mandate of the tithe as found throughout scripture. Failure to do so risks severe rebuke from the Lord, while adherence is met with abundant

⁷³ Boloje, B Onpriode and Alphonso Groenewald, "Hypocrisy in Stewardship: an Ethical Reading of Malachi 3:6-12 in the context of Christian Stewardship", *HTS Teologiese Studies* (January 2014), vol. 70, issue 1.

blessing as described in the oracle Malachi offers.⁷⁴ The encouragement to respond to the gifts God entrusts us with, to be stewards of all we are, is not to be either condemned or denied. There does seem to be a disconnect though when it comes to the manner in which the church engages stewardship at this level though.

Consider how some of the formal church leadership structures of the church (Finance Committee, Stewardship Committee, Business Administrator, etc.) utilize the stewardship tools to frame intended outcomes. Given that the scope of responsibility given to the financial related areas of a church's ministry, it is no wonder that high emphasis is placed on the aggregation of data available from stewardship campaigns and historical records. While this will undeniably differ from church to church, there are a few general assumptions that might be made. First, it is at least implied that one of the products of a stewardship campaign will result in a pledge card or commitment record offered by potential giving units. Contained in the pledge card there might be multiple areas to be measured for other aspects of discipleship that a church would be interested in. Examples might include commitments to more regular weekly attendance, willingness to engage in small group ministries and intent to be more fervent in prayer and service which would be helpful to any church body. But in actuality, it is the amount of financial resource that is being pledged by each giving unit that is the primary piece of information being sought.

Like the variety found in the pledge card makeup, there are various ways in which the financial pledge information is utilized. For some entities, a simple aggregation of the individual amounts pledged will suffice. Some churches will do an analysis of the number of pledging units compared to years previous, and maybe an even more in-depth analysis of pledged units

⁷⁴ Malachi 3:6-12

relative to the number of identified giving units in each year. Going further, some will even give unit by unit analysis to measure the increases among each identified giver. The end result though is the same. The church is looking for some measure by which to make budgetary plans for the coming year. Much like the balance sheet in any corporation, the end goal for most stewardship campaigns is make sure the expected assets for the next year will take care of the anticipated liabilities to be incurred.

It is understandable that this would be seen as common practice and exemplifying responsible stewardship on behalf of the church. It would be hard to argue against that. But the truth is, there seems to be some double standard in asking individual giving units to give faithfully and sacrificially while the church itself does not always model the same behavior. This is not to imply that the church does not need to make tough decisions regarding finances and resources. Rather, the church often seeks the implied security of knowing the commitments they are making on behalf of the church body for financial spending over a given period of time. In other words, the church does not always adhere to the same measure or practice that God will provide in the midst of faithful living. Again, this should not be understood as call for churches to become irresponsible in their financial behavior under the guise of “faithful belief in the blessings of God”. Such a position might quickly lead down the road of prosperity theology whereby the realization of goals is directly correlated to the cumulative prayer life of the congregation. Instead, the church must adhere to the same faithful practices as a collective body as is expected of the individual congregant. The language used by the church intends to communicate such, but the dependence on the pledge cards conveys that the church feels confident to be faithful only when they have “hard numbers” at hand.⁷⁵ The truth of the matter is

⁷⁵ While there is a heavy reliance in some churches on pledge cards, it should be noted that there is not a contractual obligation for pledges to be fulfilled.

that pledge cards are at best good faith intentions on the part of each pledging giving unit. Regardless of the methodology by which the information from pledge cards is interpreted, the reliance on such a measure may only provide a sense of emotional assurance, as pledges cannot be enforced in the manner of an accounts payable schedule. More importantly though, the church is not necessarily faithfully living in the same sense they are encouraging their congregants to embody. In short, the church is asking the individual units to give by faith while depending on some false measure of “hard numbers” to carry out its own duties and mission.

There is a more significant issue though which relates to issue of discipleship. Recalling that discipleship contains aspects of spiritual formation,⁷⁶ it is necessary to spotlight the role of the church in how stewardship is understood and conveyed. In the case of the church, when stewardship is correlated solely with the financial aspects of a person’s life, the church falls short of its imperative to give instruction regarding the totality of stewardship.⁷⁷ This myopic perspective neglects to take into account the more robust understanding of stewardship available to the Christian mindset. Simply taking into account the vows a person takes in becoming a member of a United Methodist Church highlight the shortsightedness of many stewardship programs. The membership vows of the United Methodist Church ask each person if they will support the church with their “prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness”.⁷⁸ It is obvious that the vows are much broader than simply tracking one’s financial contribution. Yet, rarely are concerted efforts then made to measure how people are fulfilling the other aspects of their vows as individuals. Given that these vows are taken in the context of the church community, it begs the question, what role does the church as an institution play in modeling this

⁷⁶ (Tennant, *The Making of the Christian* 2005)

⁷⁷ (Boloje and Groenewald 2014)

⁷⁸ *The United Methodist Church Book of Worship* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992). Pg. 93.

vital aspect of spiritual formation? Further, how is spiritual formation as practiced by the church connected to leadership development?

These questions loomed large for the small study group seeking a more intentional means by which the church might model a broader and more faithful understanding of stewardship. If in fact the mission of the church was to make disciples, it would require that the church sought to do at least two things; first, to measure and hold to account some defined characteristics of discipleship for individuals and second, to have the church itself live by these same measures.

Several different biblical themes emerged as this new line of thinking took root. Old Testament narratives recalled the faith of Abraham, the reluctant leadership of Moses, and the anointing of King David as ways in which these men represented far more than their individual selves. Instead, they began to be seen as archetypes of a more robust system by which leadership impacts and influences its followers. The leadership of each of these men, as remembered in scripture, served interests far beyond themselves. Simply speaking, the actions of these biblical leaders directly shaped the means by which we understand and cultivate discipleship today. In exploring the uniqueness of each leader and their contributions, a few similarities presented themselves. Most notably, each of these men were shepherds. Outside of those familiar with such biblical motifs or an understanding of some ancient near east cultures, the connection might go easily missed and looked over. For those who are familiar though, shepherding in ancient biblical times serves as both an occupation as well as a leadership model that is recurring throughout Scripture. It serves as a means by which biblical leaders are measured and referred to in the dispensation of their duties and constituencies. The measure is simple – either good or bad. The model though drives beyond the imagery of the shepherd watching his flock by night.

While various characteristics and attributes related to the shepherding role are found in Abraham, Moses and David, their example and leadership are in the end inadequate for sustaining a relationship between God and His creation. Ultimately, in the New Testament, we witness the emergence of the Messiah foretold in the prophets, Jesus, who lays claim to the title of the Good Shepherd. We will explore the richness of the shepherd imagery in the next chapter, but this exploration of shepherding in the study group led to another important concept that would guide the relationship of the church and the individual in relation to stewardship...and ultimately leadership development.

Covenant as a Guide

The practice and understanding of covenant can be found all around us. Even in secular circles, there is an understanding of covenant that aids in the establishment of relationships. Simply put, a covenant is an agreement between two or more parties by which all parties have a vested interest in the others carrying out their respective obligations. Merriam Webster defines covenant as, “a usually formal, solemn, and binding agreement.”⁷⁹ We see the covenantal practice used in everything from apartment leases to the most intimate and important relationships we find ourselves immersed in each day. These agreements are conditional in the sense that all participating parties have obligations and responsibilities to adhere to in order for the covenant to remain in place. Failure to comply with the agreed upon terms risks the covenant being broken, and the compact rendered null and void.

⁷⁹ Merriam-Webster online Dictionary, accessed February 17, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/covenant>

Take for example the covenant of marriage. Tradition dictates that vows are taken, in the presence of witnesses, and both parties agree to adhere to the sacred promises made to one another. In the case of Christian marriage, this covenant is further expanded in that it is understood God is taking part in this relationship as well. God's inclusion in this intimate binding of two people is in some sense explained in the expanded definition of covenant as offered by Daniel J. Elazar:

“A morally informed agreement or pact based upon voluntary consent, established by mutual oaths or promises, involving or witnessed by some transcendent higher authority, between peoples or parties having independent status...for joint action or obligation to achieve defined ends (limited or comprehensive) under conditions of mutual respect, which protect the individual integrity of all the parties to it.”⁸⁰

Elazar, as a political scientist, was intrigued with the relationship of the institution of governments and their constituents. Elazar often references his Jewish upbringing and background as a profound influence on his perspective of relationships and power dynamics. Given this context, his work has bearing on the relationship of the institution of the church and its constituent members, just as it does on the institution of marriage and the individual parties being married. In each case, there is a sense of integrity that must be maintained by all parties as a part of a shared community. It is in this perception of community that “covenant relationships emphasize trust, mutuality, and shared values.”⁸¹ Khalib Fischer and Jonathan Schultz expand

⁸⁰ D. J. Elazar, *Covenant and Polity in Biblical Israel: Biblical Foundations and Jewish Expressions* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995). Pg, 22-23.

⁸¹ Neuman, G. A. and J. R. Kickul. Organizational Citizenship Behaviors: Achievement Orientation and Personality. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 13 (1998).

upon this thought further, applying it to the leader-follower dynamic, stating “at the root of covenant is an interpersonal dimension between and among leaders and followers.”⁸² The church is uniquely suited to excel in this “interpersonal dimension”.

The very formal sense of covenant though does not fully capture the emotional connection available and necessary in ensuring the potential that relationships have the opportunity to be transformational rather than merely transactional. Elazar again informs our discussion in his exploration of the Hebrew term *hesed*. He explains that *hesed* conveys the loving fulfillment for the obligations of covenant. Elazar was clear that it required both parties to go “beyond the letter of the law”.⁸³ Much like the shift from spiritual formation to discipleship, moving from simple agreement to *hesed* requires that there be mutual care and concern for one another. In essence, there is an inherent morality stemming from the sense of covenant by which both parties are drawn to seek the very best for one another. It is this mutual care and concern, combined with the agreed to obligations of each party, that is at the heart of *hesed*.⁸⁴

This sentiment is echoed by Cam Caldwell and Zuhair Hasan as they researched the complexity of relationships between leader and follower. They surmised that the impact of covenant was often dismissed and seen to be lacking in a result orientation.⁸⁵ They argued against such a view and instead presented a compelling case that covenant leadership - understood as *hesed* - had great capacity for empowerment of followers, thereby benefitting the whole in a more substantial manner. Caldwell and Hasan clearly maintained that *hesed* provided

⁸² Fischer, Khalib J. and Jonathan Schultz. Covenant and Empowerment: Integrative Themes for Organizational Leadership and Behavior. *Organization Development Journal*, vol 35 (2017-10-1)

⁸³ (Elazar 1995), Pg. 71.

⁸⁴ (Fischer and Schultz 2017-10-1)

⁸⁵ Caldwell, Cam and Zuhair Hasan. Covenantal Leadership and the Psychological Contract: Moral Insights for the Modern Leader. *Journal of Management Development*, vol. 35 (2016).

a pivotal role in leadership, especially in terms of the central role of leaders valuing and honoring followers.

With respect to this present work, it is in this vein of *hesed* that we return to our previous recollection of the small group study and the strategies they undertook in an effort to address several matters facing the church. Imagining what it might look like when the actions of the church reflected like a mirror the love its constituents conveyed could be extraordinary and transformative all at once. To be sure, there were times the discussion took on a more business-like approach. In the end though, there was a deep conviction, like that Caldwell and Hasan describe, for the church and its congregants to take a determined approach to mission, stewardship, and the ongoing development of leaders and followers in a manner demonstrative of the spirit of *hesed*.

The expanded concept of covenant drove the work that started in that moment. Over the course of several months, a program was designed intent on growth in each of these areas for both leader and follower, institution and individual. Inherent in this was the recognition that an immense amount of trust and transparency would be required. Further, there had to be a mechanism by which accountability could be achieved without creating a top down, or transactional system.

In time, the obligatory annual stewardship campaign loomed large. As a group, we already felt some unease at presenting the long-held tradition of plea letters, lay testimonies on the joy of giving, and of course, the pledge cards given our research thus far. As much as we knew that long term members of the church expected a familiar program, the reality was that the pledge cards seemed a futile task as they were not really useful in terms of how the church and Finance Committee developed the budget. In truth, regardless of what the aggregate amount of

the pledge cards represented, the Finance Committee relied much more heavily on historic giving and trends. The pledge card was a long-held tradition though that signaled a “proper” stewardship campaign had been conducted. It served as a stark symbol that in our particular setting, the familiar traditions and comfortable norms proved to be more compelling than prospect of change that might require risk and faith. This was a profound example of the preference to manage what is known rather than to lead towards what could be. The main obstacle was blatantly us.

It was also patently obvious that the pledge card in and of itself had no direct correlation with the overall mission of the church, outside of giving some sense of assurance that some percentage of the church’s activities and operations might be financially underwritten. This all assumed though that these pledge cards were understood as some sort of promissory note, if only in a social sense. In reality though, the cards were not enforceable, and always subject to unforeseen circumstances or emotional responses that could impact amounts positively or negatively (most often the case) on the part of the giving units.

The convergence of timing between the stewardship season and the completion of the small study group proved to be fortuitous. The groups had identified several areas of interest for focus over the next several years that could be easily adapted as circumstances dictated. They knew that it would take time to shift the ethos of an entire congregation, but the stewardship season was seen as an ideal opportunity to bring together three different areas in more a congruent manner. In partnership with the standing stewardship committee, the study group proposed an idea that would expand the scope of the stewardship team as well as help to guide the future ministries of the church by collecting data from individual giving units to determine discipleship development needs. By doing so, the church sought to be responsive, rather than

reactive, to the spiritual formation needs of the congregation thereby empowering the entire church to more effectively and collectively carry out the mission of the church. The three areas of focus the stewardship team and study group agreed upon became:

1. Reframe stewardship as a way of living out our discipleship
2. Development of a discipleship self-measurement tool for individual use
3. Create a culture of transformational leadership guided by discipleship

It was determined early on that there would not be considerable energy expended on attempting to craft some well worded mission statement that differed from what already existed. The group recognized the essential nature of the mission statement but were convinced that nothing needed to be added to what scripture had already provided in the Great Commission.⁸⁶ The recognition that the current mission statement was already closely related to – in truth derived from – the Great Commission provided confidence they were starting with a strong foundation. Instead, they focused their energy on determining essential discipleship characteristics and means to measure such characteristics. Additionally, they wanted to incorporate guideposts by which the work and actions of the church were directed. Recalling the work found in *Simple Church*,⁸⁷ they were inspired to adopt the simple mantra: *Loving God, Loving Others, and Serving Others*.

The three-clause statement provided a means by which efforts that the church undertook collectively would come to test themselves upon. Regardless of the number of requests to start and host anything ranging from Bible study to quilting circles to the various youth and children's

⁸⁶ Matthew 28:19-20

⁸⁷ (Rainer and Geiger 2006)

fellowship groups or other ministry initiatives, there needed to be a connection back to the guiding statement, which was understood to be congruent with the Great Commission. Additionally, there needed to be a mechanism by which empowerment - coupled with accountability – might take place between the church and its constituents. The understanding of *covenant*⁸⁸ as Daniel Elazar described served as a foundation for such a mechanism. It required then that just as the church held its membership accountable to its vows and discipleship practices, the church itself was held accountable as shepherd in a manner that exemplified those same characteristics to the best of its ability. In the spirit of mutuality, both the church and member, leader and follower, would be engaged in the same discipleship practices together in an accountable manner. In other words, the anticipated goal was that leadership might be recognized from a variety of perspectives and places (organizationally, individually, etc.) thereby creating a more transformational environment from which ministry might occur.

Ironically, examples of such a relationship are more often currently found in corporate settings than in the church. There has been increased attention and study given to the field of employees and supervisors, leaders and followers, in the business setting, and the added benefit each has on the other over the past thirty years. Fischer and Schultz, referenced earlier, spoke of covenant being foundational to the interpersonal dimension of the relationship between followers and leaders.⁸⁹ This same concept then would be applied in the relationship between congregant and the church with the aim of discipleship empowerment. Fischer and Schultz drew upon observations in the corporate world, whereby they noted, “the popular leadership approaches, along with organizational best practices for processes, structure, and culture, all seem to touch upon the importance of empowering employees to grow and develop as human beings in the

⁸⁸ See definition and footnote 65.

⁸⁹ (Fischer and Schultz 2017-10-1)

workplace context, in such a way that benefits the entire organization.”⁹⁰ Intuitively, the ambitious work our church had undertaken mimicked some of the same conclusions that Fischer and Schultz, among others, had so articulately arrived at.

The team was still committed to the three-clause phrase that would provide a framework for its discipleship process. In doing so, the team set upon the task of identifying some basic discipleship markers to give some substance for the three focus areas. The following six marks were categorized under three headings that coincided with the *Loving God*, *Loving Others* and *Serving Others* guidance.

Loving God

- Praying Daily
- Worshipping Weekly

Loving Others

- Reading Scripture
- Creating Community

Serving Others

- Serving Missionally
- Giving Generously⁹¹

The six marks, accompanied by the purpose headings, were compiled into a “Covenant” document. Initially, this document was handed out as an outline for a sermon and teaching series that the whole church participated in. Sunday School classes as well as community worship

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ See Figure 1. This particular piece comes from First UMC in Lubbock, TX.

focused their attention for a period of time on the identified areas to set the stage for the upcoming joint work of the study group and stewardship team. As is common in the ebb and flow of participation in the church, the beginning of the fall school year saw a jump in both attendance and engagement across the board. Worship attendance, small group formation, and fellowship group participation would significantly increase among attendees along with the expectation of new programming offered by the leadership of the church. Understanding that this focus on discipleship and its corresponding expectations would present a dynamic shift for both the congregation and the church itself, there was intentional effort given to educating the church about this new venture. Sunday School curriculum was geared around discipleship practices, preaching was deliberately focused upon the addressed areas, and leadership began to incorporate not only the language of discipleship, but the practice of it in their decision-making. To be sure, awkwardness ensued, and would continue for more than a year as everyone worked to lean into this new paradigm for spiritual and leadership growth.

The six identified marks were meant to apply to all people regardless of age, current involvement, or spiritual maturity. Whether someone had been a devout practicing Christian for all of their 70+ years or had just recently begun to explore the mysteries of faith, each of the marks applied to what was understood as a fruitful and engaged life in Jesus Christ. By no means was it meant to be an exhaustive list. It did though offer at least a baseline. The marks mirrored the work Michael Foss, Senior Pastor of Prince of Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church, had begun in his own congregation to move them beyond the membership model of the church which had become unsustainable.⁹²

⁹² Foss, Michael W., *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

Within the first few months of rolling out this emerging development strategy, new published materials and aids began to be requested and created to more clearly articulate the intended message. It was becoming abundantly evident that the messaging of how this shift was preferable (and more importantly, faithful!) to the more transactional model that the church had operated under for so long needed to be simple and concise. The question most often asked was how this shift was going to benefit the congregation. The very nature of such statements made it evident that in many ways, the church had failed to impart the sense that a vital aspect of the Christian ethos is to live for others beyond ourselves. This new undertaking (shifting to a discipleship model) provided an invitation for the church and its constituents to redirect the focus from self and back to where it belonged...God and the *missio Dei*. While many factors (historic, recent tradition, and a distinctly American context, among others) presented as potential obstacles, adherence to the divine mission needed to take precedence, we felt.

Recognizing the enormous undertaking we had embarked upon, we sought to make the goals as clear as possible. At the same time, a conscious decision was made to not be too specific as to how each discipleship mark goal might be accomplished in an effort to foster creativity. The goal was to be broad in scope without being ambiguous. Instead, the casting of such a discipleship vision was meant to serve as a catalyst for exploration in spiritual formation and the expression of *hesed*. The development then of the covenant document (Fig. 1) served as a bullet point listing of broad discipleship goals each person might then embark upon.

It was recognized early on that each congregant would find themselves at different comfort or familiarity levels within the framework of the stated six marks. Seasoned adherents and novices alike would journey along this pathway. Regardless of where one understood

Figure 1



themselves to be in this construct though, it was the intention of the church that all would take part in this exercise.

As Fall quickly approached, this new venture was quite naturally adapted for use in the annual stewardship campaign. By the time the campaign was upon the church, the language of discipleship that had been adopted was being used in a much more comfortable manner, and there was a growing sense of commonality among the congregation. The positive reception though neglected to recognize that this paradigm shift for the church also threatened to simply become a new packaging for a transactional model primarily benefitting the church. In other words, while individuals were undoubtedly paying attention to aspects of their discipleship, without the church as an institution making some similar move, there was a real risk that individuals would in fact grow in their discipleship but that the church would once again neglect its charge to more effectively become an incubator for discipleship (spiritual formation shaped by *hesed*) and evangelism (sent forth into the world).⁹³

It was customary in that particular church – as it is in countless churches across the landscape – for the stewardship campaign to culminate with the collection of pledge cards. This had become an expectation, as well as a moment of great celebration, especially among the congregants that had spent many years promoting and building their beloved spiritual home. Understanding that much of the conventional membership model many of them had spent their life adhering to was undergoing a drastic overhaul, the wise decision was made to use a tool that on the surface appeared to be familiar. At the same time, addressing a means by which the marks of discipleship beyond financial giving could additionally be assessed was also of


⁹³ As guided by the Great Commission, Matthew 28:16-20.

importance. Concurrently, the church began to assess its own role in how it could best cultivate an environment by which development was encouraged and curated.

The solution presented itself in the form of a self-diagnostic tool that asked participants to “capture” where they currently understood themselves in relation to the identified marks of discipleship.⁹⁴ This was an exercise that we asked everyone at the church to participate in, contrary to the single pledge card that came from each giving unit or family. In doing so, the intent was to create familiarity with the language of discipleship, and then to encourage all people to enter into “covenant” with each other and the church by making progress in each of the identified areas over the coming year. Utilizing the methodology of past stewardship models, letters were sent to households detailing the plans for the coming four to six weeks with the diagnostic tool included in each mailing. One major difference from past programs was that every person in each household was asked to participate by filling out their own diagnostic tool. By doing so, the hope was that due to the conversations around stewardship, and more broadly, discipleship, families would be drawn into reflection regarding these practices, thereby inviting whole family units into the prayerful consideration of what God was calling them to. If fully realized, this exercise would create opportunities for families and individuals to share their own understanding of discipleship with one another. In sharing with one another, it was believed that this deliberate focus on awareness of discipleship both in the church and the home would generate a higher level of accountability on a personal and corporate level. The engine of leadership development (creation of social capital) would begin to turn, and the church would again become an incubator for leadership.

⁹⁴ See Figure 2.

Figure 2



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH • LUBBOCK

FIRSTLBK

MOVED BY JESUS. LOVING PEOPLE. SERVING ALL.

My Discipleship Covenant

Worship (how I love God) – per month

1	2	3	4	5
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Small Group/Bible Study (how I love others) – how often

Never	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly
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Service/Missions (how I serve others) – how often

Never	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly
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In what ways do you serve? _____

Giving (my tithes, gifts, and offerings)

I will invest in the work God is doing at First LBK:

\$ _____ weekly for 52 weeks

\$ _____ monthly for 12 months

\$ _____ one time

\$ _____ other as follows _____

Prayer (my intimate relationship with God) – how often

Never	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly
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This is the covenant I make with God! I realize there are other areas God will be working on in my spiritual life, but through God's grace, I will move towards being the dynamic disciple God is calling me to be!

Name/Signature _____

Date _____



As an example, a family of four (i.e. mother, father, teenage son and elementary school daughter) would be sent a letter containing four separate covenant cards explaining the new focus on discipleship. In such a letter, reference would be made to the tradition of the stewardship season in the church. Recognizing that this season often took place at a similar time each year, the letter would elaborate that stewardship (financial and otherwise) was understood to be a means by which we “managed” the gifts endowed to everyone by God so that each of us might participate in the larger mission and purpose of the church, namely “making disciples of Jesus Christ”. As such, financial stewardship would be incorporated as an integral aspect of our discipleship, but by no means the only one. Further, understanding stewardship in terms of discipleship also invites us to consider elements beyond our financial giving as means by which we experience our relationship with God and one another. Additionally, the letter would explain how the self-diagnostic tool can serve as an aid to measure where we see ourselves currently and invites us to consider how we might grow in each of these areas over time. Enclosed with the letter then would be a separate tool for each member of the household. An adapted version of the tool appropriate for younger children was sent in place of the general tool sent to everyone else.

This methodology was – and continues to be – employed in order that the whole congregation might be engaged in what is more appropriately defined as a discipleship campaign. The benefits are also evident and measurable beyond the traditional stewardship model which at best captures participating giving units that consciously return a pledge card. By inviting the entire congregation, we create a direct means by which every person, young and old, has an opportunity to be more intentional in their spiritual formation and to become more aware of ways in which they are participating in the Body of Christ. In a very concrete fashion, this

method addresses a fundamental issue Dallas Willard articulates claiming “spiritual formation in a Christian tradition answers a specific human question: *What kind of person am I going to be?*”⁹⁵

Having utilized and refined this process over the past seven years, several other unintended consequences revealed themselves. As people grew more comfortable over the years with the language of discipleship, as well as the paradigm shift of moving from a membership model to a discipleship model, the questions and expectations of congregants shifted in kind. Individuals as well as groups took their discipleship more seriously, and they began to have greater expectations of the church to play a more instructive role in the spiritual formation of people and groups both in and out of the church. But the past norm of people walking into the pastor’s office passively letting he or she know what needed to be done to address areas of need in the church began to decrease. Instead, individuals have felt an increased level of empowerment to start new ministries and groups. Rather than the church becoming a bottleneck or gatekeeper of potential new ministry initiatives, the church had given parameters and leadership guidance for individuals to be risk-takers to themselves engage in new ministries.

Accountability also began to take a new shape. Accountability was not simply about whether people fulfilled their pledges or were adequately participating in the ministries of the church. Now, the congregation was paying close attention as to whether the church itself was living by the same values and virtues they were teaching and encouraging in the lives of its parishioners. And rather than viewing this in a simple leader-follower dynamic, the language of being shepherded began to take on a much greater significance and meaning. There was a strong and growing expectation that the church had a vital role in guidance, and that the responsibility

⁹⁵ (Tennant, *The Making of the Christian* 2005)

to shepherd its flock demanded that the relationship transcend the leader/follower dynamic or the transactional relationship that too often was apparent in the past. As with any model though, there would, and do, remain potential pitfalls and struggles. In such moments, the need to be shepherded becomes so very necessary.

The Voice of the Shepherd

Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

During a recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land in October of 2018, our able guide Mike⁹⁶ instructed the bus driver to make a slight detour on the route west from Jericho up through the mountains to Jerusalem. It would have been a similar pathway to the route traveled by ancient pilgrims making their way from places like the Galilee region, outposts in the Jordanian River Valley, and from Jewish communities to the east for centuries. To be sure, it would also be similar to the route Jesus himself probably traveled on several occasions, maybe after his encounter with Nicodemus and surely in his last journey leading to that fateful week of his crucifixion and resurrection. This particular detour though was not intended to remind the pilgrims of that particular trip. Instead, it was meant to make a clear and dramatic connection between the 23rd Psalm and its author King David with three other key figures in our Christian canon: Abraham, Moses, and Jesus of Nazareth.

⁹⁶ Mike Abu is a longtime guide and friend with Educational Opportunities and has guided thousands of pilgrims throughout the Holy Land and Mediterranean. His expertise of the history, geography, and spiritual significance create high demand for his services. Most tours led by bishops of the United Methodist Church are guided by Mike, per their request.

As the pilgrims filed off the bus to peer across the stark Judean Desert landscape, the lack of life was breathtaking. Amid the arid rocks and sand, it was hard to imagine anyone being able to survive for long periods in such unforgiving conditions. As people approached the overlook of the valley before them, there was a deafening silence that gripped the group. Without any knowledge of what lay before them, they awaited eagerly for Mike to share the significance of this place.

Mike - always careful to make the distinction between fact, tradition, and myth – began to explain that the valley we were standing on the rim of was of significant importance traditionally for a great number of Jews and Christians. Though it was impossible to prove with certainty, the valley we were overlooking was often referred to as the “Valley of the Shadow of Death”. The naming was not lost on the group, and Mike immediately had their attention. As we looked upon the barren landscape, Mike recited the 23rd Psalm again, emphasizing the word shepherd.

As the hot desert wind blew sand around us, Mike explained that if you continued to walk down this very same valley about ten miles, you would arrive at its end. If a person stopped and looked straight ahead, they would see Jericho directly in front of them. In the foreground, you would be able to make out the archaeological digs that continue to unearth ancient Jericho, presumably the site where Joshua led the Hebrew people in their first steps to take possession of the land promised them by God. After lingering there, you could look about halfway up the cliff face on the left (the north side of the valley wall) and see a very old Greek Orthodox monastery that tradition held was built upon the caves that Jesus spent time in during his forty day fast and temptation period in the desert. He retreated, traditions states, to this spot after being baptized by his cousin John the Baptist a few miles away on the opposite side of Jericho. The group

recognized all of the references to scripture as well as geography having visited each of these spots already. During Mike's description of the valley below and the sights you might encounter on a trek towards the Jordan River, we watched as young Bedouin shepherds led their flocks along the barren hillsides. We all wondered from where they were traveling and to where they were heading.

While Mike finished reminding us of these seminal events in scripture, he recounted several references to shepherds within the Psalm that would have been understood as common knowledge to the ancient Jewish sensibility and were carried through to the time of Jesus. His brief teaching claimed that the very same techniques and practices that ancient shepherds like Abraham and Moses continued to the present in the Bedouin shepherds we saw before us. He impressed upon each of us the deep connection of each shepherd to the individual sheep and goats of their flock, their intimate knowledge of food and water sources, and the sense of responsibility each shepherd felt towards those they were entrusted to care for as well as their significance to the broader community.

The manner by which society tends to characterize or assess other individuals might be described along a spectrum. Such a spectrum might run between poles entitled "bad" on one end and "good" on the other. If any of us takes a truly honest assessment of our actions, we readily recognize that at different moments or times of our lives, we might place ourselves along various points of such a spectrum. The circumstances surrounding such judgments might change and possibly even offer a modicum of rationale for why we could not always place ourselves under the "good" heading. But as many know, the more people depend on a person or an institution, the more the pressure mounts for those leaders, those shepherds, upon whom so much depends. To lay claim then to be "good" at all times and situations would be inaccurate at best. Yet that is

the call the shepherd strives for in the biblical witness and in practice today. It is in Jesus that we see the full characterization of the “Good Shepherd” as found in the 10th chapter of the Gospel of John:

“⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. ¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”⁹⁷

The image – and more importantly, substance – of the shepherd is one that has endured throughout the ages. Countless references and perspectives to better comprehend the role and heart of the shepherd continue to be offered in contemporary society, as the imagery and importance is foreign to so many. The shepherd is more than a positional leader, but also embodies aspects found in the loving parent. The shepherd has to be all at once veterinarian, nurse maid, warrior, comforter, nurturer, and provider.⁹⁸ To be sure, even to those supposedly aware of the significance, there is still much to be learned from the current day practitioners of this ancient vocation. Rev. Sir George Adam Smith remarked about the myriad layers of the shepherd in his exploration of the Holy Land in the late 1800’s.

⁹⁷ John 10:7-11

⁹⁸ Laniak, Timothy, *Shepherds After my Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (InterVarsity Press, 2006).

“On the boundless Eastern pasture, so different from the narrow meadows and dyked hillsides with which we are familiar, the shepherd is indispensable. With us, sheep are often left to themselves. In such landscape as Judea, where a day’s pasture is thinly scattered over an unfenced tract of country, covered with delusive paths, still frequented by wild beasts, and rolling off into the desert, a man and his character are indispensable. On some high moor, across which at night the hyenas howl, when you meet him, sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, armed, leaning on his staff, and looking out over his scattered sheep, every one of them on his heart, you understand why the shepherd of Judea sprang to the front in his people’s history; why they gave his name to their king, and made him the symbol of Providence; why Christ took him as the symbol of self-sacrifice.”⁹⁹

Rev. Smith’s vivid description and powerful imagery help the listener to recall some of the most profound biblical references to shepherds and their role in our spiritual lexicon. In the Old Testament, three of the most important figures in Judeo-Christian tradition are all introduced to us as shepherds at some point in their lives: Abraham, Moses, and David. While each of the men did in fact spend time looking after literal flocks, that experience was imperative for each of them to the higher calling of shepherding the flock of God’s people. The opening line of the 23rd Psalm conveys the sacred title to the Lord himself – “The Lord is my shepherd”.¹⁰⁰ To be a shepherd then is to hold a position that goes far beyond title, and encompasses a responsibility to self, to flock, and to the community. The shepherd must hold in tension both intrinsic and

⁹⁹ Smith, George Adam, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land: Especially in Relation to the History of Israel and of the Early Church* (A.C. Armstrong and Son Publishers: 1907) Online digital copy, pg. 312.

¹⁰⁰ Psalm 23:1

extrinsic expectations that will undoubtedly be at odds at some point. It is in this tension that the designation of the *good* or *bad* shepherd is determined.

In a sermon titled “The Sheep of His Hand”,¹⁰¹ Dr. Sandra Richter carefully explored the characteristics and training of a prospective shepherd. One of the first, and most poignant points she made was that nothing about being a shepherd is taught from a book. There is no formal education in becoming a shepherd. In truth, shepherding is learned over a lifetime of mentorship. It’s an apprenticeship served under all of those who have come before in preceding generations. The knowledge that was handed down was learned through centuries of difficult decisions and backbreaking work, day in and day out. Dr. Richter shared that for the shepherd, lambing season was seen as a crisis moment, where that delicate balance between life and death was held in constant tension, and the reality of the daily struggle for the shepherd and the flock were laid bare. This tension was not just a matter of economic stress on the part of the shepherd due to possible loss of the ewe or lam. This tension was felt deep down inside in a very real way due to the deep care and concern the shepherd has for every member of his flock. The individual characteristics, patterns and tendencies of each member are known intimately to the shepherd. The shepherd knows each one by name. This concern for the flock is born over years of observation that sheep simply do not make good decisions. Their common defense mechanism when faced with danger is stand still and bleat loudly. They have a tendency to freeze when threat is imminent. Yet, they are the responsibility of the shepherd in a way that often defies sensibility. From the perspective of the sheep, the wild might provide the nourishment they need, but it is also full of dangers that the sheep either fail to comprehend or simply choose to

¹⁰¹ “The Sheep of His Hand”. Sermon delivered at First United Methodist Church, Lubbock, Texas. November 22, 2020.

neglect, in sure confidence that their particular shepherd will be there to provide the necessary security for them.

It is with this nonsensical and untenable understanding that the biblical accounts of shepherds become essential for consideration. For it is the shepherd that presents as the litmus test for measuring and envisioning leadership over and over. Moses, for example, in seeking a successor to himself to lead the Israelites says to the Lord:

“¹⁶ May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community ¹⁷ to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”¹⁰²

Just as Moses was drawn from the fields tending Jesse’s flock, Moses recognizes his own training and experience as valuable in preparing one to lead a stubborn people who often, like sheep, make bad decisions. Later, the Psalmist implores the Lord to send someone to deliver His people yet again. In this instance the measure is great indeed as God is referred to as the Shepherd of Israel, and whose mercy and guidance is necessary for the moment:

“¹ Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth ² before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us. ³ Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Numbers 27:16-17.

¹⁰³ Psalm 80:1-3

David, anointed by God to lead His people Israel was plucked from the fields watching after his father's flocks in a manner that confused everyone – particularly his older brothers – to be the successor to Saul. God's assessment of David measured the character of his heart, not the order of his birth or the expectations of others. David imploring God to deliver His people yet again exemplified the character that drew God's attention in the first place, even when David fell short of the calling that had been placed upon him at times and his placement along the “good/bad” spectrum required him to repent and beg God's mercy. This same assessment is made in the writings of the prophets when they recognize the absence of leadership, lamenting the days of old and the actions of the shepherds that had come before:

*“¹¹ Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people—
where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock?”¹⁰⁴*

The language and corollary with shepherds are obviously not limited to references in the Old Testament though. Jesus and the Apostle Paul refer to the same imagery and deeply understood connections with shepherds throughout their teaching. Like many of the references found in the Old Testament, the New Testament guides not only characteristics of what constitutes the role of “good” shepherds, but also warns against possible obstacles and pitfalls when such guidance is not followed.

¹⁰⁴ Isaiah 60:11

“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”¹⁰⁵

The imagery of the shepherd is rampant among the scriptural text. It is not limited to any specific time or place and appears to be relevant throughout ancient society. During the time period that authorship of the biblical witness occurred, it didn’t matter whether one was rich or poor, urban or rural, the implications of the shepherding metaphor were evident to everyone. Society as a whole understood the importance and necessity of the shepherd in both a literal and metaphorical sense. It therefore is not an accident that the shepherd’s crook was often used in depictions of nation rulers throughout Near East cultures.¹⁰⁶ What must it mean for us in a modern context to acquire and implement the similar sentiments that the biblical writers intended to convey? How does such a metaphor, attributed to the humble shepherds in the field¹⁰⁷ at the Advent of Jesus as well as the “Shepherd of Israel”¹⁰⁸, apply in our modern context?

While it has already been noted that many of the patriarchs (Abraham, Moses) were noted shepherds of literal livestock at least for some period of their lives, there seems to be a

¹⁰⁵ 1 Peter 5:1-4

¹⁰⁶ (Richter 2020)

¹⁰⁷ Luke 2:8-20

¹⁰⁸ Psalm 80:1

direct implication of shepherding that provides a training ground for leaders in the Kingdom of God. Take for example the case of David.

David, whose life and legacy is symbolic of the pinnacle of Jewish history, is more than the sum of his varied experiences and talents. In scripture, directly following the anointing by Samuel, David is portrayed as a musician who is brought before King Saul to sooth him after being tormented by an evil spirit. His skill with the lyre and the manner in which he carried himself were pleasing to Saul. “Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.”¹⁰⁹ Prior to being brought to the court to sooth King Saul though, David was found shepherding his father Jesse’s flock.

Later, David is described as a brave warrior, discounted due to his age and the perception his older brother has of him,¹¹⁰ but confident of God’s blessing when faith was the guide he was following. During the infamous encounter with the Philistine Goliath, careful examination of the text reveals that it is again from the fields where David is shepherding that he is drawn into the dramatic scene unfolding before him. In this instance, David’s experience among the flocks is highlighted in the self-confidence he displays before King Saul regarding the taunts offered by the giant before them.

“³² David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

¹⁰⁹ 1 Samuel 16:23

¹¹⁰ 1 Samuel 17:28-29

³³ Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.”

³⁴ But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, ³⁵ I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. ³⁶ Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. ³⁷ The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you.”¹¹¹

It was in the fields where David learned to tend to his flock; to put the needs of someone, or something, else above his own was a trait developed over years of paying attention to the sheep in his care. The compassionate perspective developed over years of being in the wilderness, demanding attentiveness to the unique needs and concerns each ram, ewe and lamb presented becoming second nature for David the shepherd. Such is the case for any “good” shepherd. Even after the dramatic events that unfolded between David and King Saul, culminating with David being enthroned as King over a unified Jewish nation, it was the foundation built by David’s experience as a shepherd that served as a spiritual (and practical) formative catalyst in David’s leadership of Israel.

¹¹¹ 1 Samuel 17:32-37

To the outside observer, the responsibilities of the shepherd might appear to be rudimentary at best. Essentially, according to Timothy Laniak, the major priorities a shepherd must focus on fall into three basic categories; food and water, rest, and security.¹¹² Unpacked further though, it becomes evident that these priorities draw upon a depth of understanding requiring skills and insight into both the individual and collective needs of the flock. “One of the most pressing challenges for shepherds is to provide food and water for animals in environments that frequently withhold these essential elements for life and production.”¹¹³ Anyone who has spent time with animals is abundantly aware that every animal responds differently. They do not all eat or drink at the same rate. Some exhibit shyness and acquiesce to the more dominant in the group. Others seem to have a complete disregard or awareness of the dangers they put themselves or the group in due to inattentiveness. Basically, they resemble the same idiosyncrasies and quirks that are commonly found among a random grouping of people. Those charged with their well-being (whether flocks or people) must develop an almost sixth sense in order to fulfill the duties required of them.

Understanding that animals at different times of the year have differing needs is a matter of experience and intense observation on the part of the shepherd. Due to temperature fluctuations in the varying seasons, Laniak details the range a shepherd might be able to wander from a reliable watering hole (closer in the summer due to the higher temps, farther in the winter). During the lambing season, awareness of the needs of pregnant ewes allows for the shepherd to make appropriate preparations for more food for the expectant mothers. These are factors that cannot simply be learned by a formal education but are born of experience and a

¹¹² Laniak, Timothy, *Shepherds After my Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (InterVarsity Press, 2006), pgs. 53-57.

¹¹³ Ibid. 54.

deep emotional connection with those entrusted to his care. In a very real sense, there is a high level of emotional intelligence on display whether enacted consciously or not.

The same is true when it comes to rest for the flock. The rugged terrain of ancient Palestine provides a stark backdrop for an at times unforgiving environment. The steep hills, sweltering heat of the summer, and long distances between food sources collectively create a recipe for severe exhaustion. The tendency to overexert the flock can result in losses of young, straggling sheep that can't keep up, and the lack of overall health leading to a loss of the very products the flock serves to provide.

The most important priority for the shepherd is the security of the flock. Providing security requires a diligence that takes into account environmental nuances and an intuitive sense of impending danger. This goes far beyond simply protecting the flock from predators and the harsh elements of the wilderness. As Dr. Richter pointed out in her message to the church, “sheep don’t make good decisions!”¹¹⁴ In other words, when left to their own devices, they often find themselves in treacherous circumstances that threaten to affect not only the individual, but the collective group. In fact, Dr. Richter pointed out that the go to response of sheep in distress or danger is to stand stubbornly still and simply cry out! Obviously, this is not a highly effective defense mechanism.

Given the almost perpetual destructive tendencies of the flock, the shepherd stands in the gap. What Laniak and others who have observed and shared about the actions of shepherds relates directly to the motivations that drive them. In earlier chapters, effort was given to exploring the nature of transactional relationships. Imagining such a construct in the shepherd/flock relationship, it might be appealing to understand the motivations of shepherds

¹¹⁴ (Richter 2020)

from a purely economic perspective. For instance, if the flock does not thrive, then neither does the shepherd or the family. The failure of the shepherd to provide for the vital needs of nourishment, rest and security might result in fewer lambs being born, less wool produced, and a higher mortality rate at the hands of predators and dangers found in the wilderness. While the shepherd might not experience any emotional loss, there could surely be an economic impact with potential to be positive, negative or neutral. This view would recognize the flock as a simple commodity, to be dealt with in whatever way best benefits the shepherd and his interests, regardless of the needs of the flock. Of course, in the interest of maximization, shepherds would be incentivized to seek they very best for their flock as measured through a cost/benefit lens as a means to maximize benefit for self.

Conversely, when viewed from a transformational perspective, the relationship between the shepherd and his flock reflects some of the same characteristics found in a covenant relationship. The interests and concerns of the other are of as much importance – if not more – of self. It is this understanding of the economy of God that we find David viewed as being both worthy and prepared for leadership in a dynamic sense. Rather than undertaking a top down, or self-serving approach to leadership, when David is enthroned as king in his new palace, it is David's desire to erect a permanent home for the Lord, a Temple. In the biblical narrative, we are introduced to the prophet Nathan for the first time¹¹⁵ when he shares a word from the Lord intended for David. Nathan relays that it will not be David that builds the Temple, but his offspring. Instead, God wants something different, and more important from David.

¹¹⁵ 2 Samuel 7:2

⁸ *“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel.’”*¹¹⁶

The Lord models for David that of utmost concern to the Lord is the care of His people, His flock, rather than a permanent home for Himself. That responsibility is entrusted to David, to shepherd and care for God’s people as he did for his father’s flocks. To be sure, David’s experience as a warrior, his relationship with Saul’s son Jonathan, and the anointing by Samuel, among other things, were all necessary elements of David’s ascension to the throne. There is no doubt though that it was his time as a shepherd that provided the training and background that would be essential for his leadership of the people Israel. And like the many leaders that had come before and countless others that would follow after, there would be moments in which he stumbled along the way. David’s primary task, his calling, would be to shepherd God’s people. It was in this light that he would be judged as to what kind of shepherd he was at different times of his life.

As is too often the case with some leaders, self-interest can take hold at a moments notice. In the case of David, that moment culminated in a chance observation from the roof of his palace when he noticed Bathsheba bathing. His interest peaked, David made inquiries about her and she was eventually delivered to him.¹¹⁷ Even after learning that she was the wife of one of his soldiers, his desire for Bathsheba outweighed the explicit instructions from the Lord to “tend the flock” of Israel. The story is well known, and the sequence of events that follow David’s lapse in leadership only compounded in time. David poor decision making in this

¹¹⁶ 2 Samuel 7:8

¹¹⁷ See 2 Samuel 11:1-5

instance result in an intentional coverup of an unintended pregnancy. By inviting Bathsheba's husband Uriah home from the battlefield, David's selfishness and shame led him to a series of attempts to hide his sinful actions: trying to get Uriah to lay with his wife (2 Samuel 11:8), intoxicating Uriah so that he would finally return to his home (2 Samuel 11:12-13), and finally making preparations through unwitting accomplices under his rule that would conclude in the death of Uriah at the battlefield. In the end, with Uriah dead, David was able to complete his injustice. "After the time of mourning was over, David had her (Bathsheba) brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord."¹¹⁸

The irony of this narrative abounds with respect to the very attributes that made David the model of leader – the shepherd – history would come to remember him as. In that simple moment of weakness, poor decision upon poor decision compounded in a way that multiple parties were affected. Uriah lost his life; Bathsheba lost her husband; the people of Israel lost warrior of character; the Lord recorded another instance of His people failing in their covenant with Him.

At some level David received what he hoped for to begin with. Bathsheba did become his wife, though at great cost. The cost of his desire went beyond the life of Uriah. The reputation of David would forever be scarred as a consequence. Though there were numerous accounts pertaining to David that recounted his selfless actions and motives, this one event demonstrated the obstacles that were, and are, ever present for any shepherd/leader. Further, there is a possible connection between the early stated desire of David to build a permanent home for the Lord and the response God relays to David via the prophet Nathan. Nathan's

¹¹⁸ 2 Samuel 11:27

proclamation is clear that David is to be the shepherd to God's people, and that his offspring would be responsible for the construction of a Temple. It is truly interesting that the child bore of David's moment of weakness would soon die, but soon after another son would be born (Solomon) that would one day be remembered for fulfilling the dream of his father.¹¹⁹

Following this low point in the character development of David, Nathan again makes an appearance in order to rebuke David on behalf of the Lord. Immediately following the account of Bathsheba and David, when Nathan presents himself in David's court, he relays a parable detailing the injustice of a rich man taking from a poor man that which was most dear to him, a ewe lamb, in order to feed a traveler.¹²⁰ Rather than take a ewe from his own abundance, the rich man chose to take from the meager belongings of the less fortunate poor man. Amid righteous anger, David demands justice equal in measure to what the poor man lost. He demands the rich man life. It is in this dramatic moment the David is made aware by Nathan that the parable is describing his own misguided actions regarding Bathsheba and Uriah. It was David that had lost his way, seeking after his own desires above that of the flock he was entrusted to care for. In that moment, David was made abundantly aware that his failure to the people he was leading resounded on multiple levels. Similar to a shepherd failing to keep watch over their sheep, the repercussions have the potential to cascade to negatively impact multiple layers deep. On the communal and individual level, David neglected to draw upon his past experience to know the peculiarities of each of his sheep – a defining characteristic for one who is to bear the mantle of shepherd.¹²¹ David failed to nurture and provide the security he alone could provide.

¹¹⁹ 2 Samuel 12:15-24

¹²⁰ 2 Samuel 12:1-6

¹²¹ Chittock, Daniel Paul, *Proactive, Systematic Pastoral Visitation in Shepherding the Contemporary Church* (ProQuest Dissertation Publishing: 2015).

If this was the end of David's story, it might mirror that of a Hollywood movie where justice is served to the unjust. Instead, this particular narrative concludes with the redemption of David. David is not devoid of consequences for his actions. His repentance is on display before Nathan. The loss of his first child with Bathsheba and the recognition that he had abused the power that had been entrusted to him would seem to shape the rest of his leadership as the ruler of Israel. David seems to return to a place that closer resembles the shepherding foundation that drew the attention and anointing of the Lord to begin with. Forever more, David would be remembered as a Good Shepherd – a title one of his descendants would reclaim centuries later.¹²²

Good Shepherds, Bad Shepherds

The lessons learned by David did not translate well to the kings and leaders that would follow by and large. For the most part, the kings that followed David failed miserably in keeping their covenant with God. The deliberate ignorance many subsequent kings displayed with respect to the relationship between God and his people reflect a complete misunderstanding of God as shepherd, and by extension, their role as a shepherd to God's people. There is a total lack of purpose for such kings to serve in any sort of shepherding role for the people they lead. The resulting breakup of the Kingdom of Israel and eventual destruction at the hands of Babylon serve as reminders and lessons to subsequent generations of the lack of leadership on display.¹²³ In the end, the utter dismissal of covenantal commitment on the part of most of David's

¹²² (Richter 2020)

¹²³ Ibid.

successors illustrates the consequences of a leader failing in the basic functions of looking after the people whose care they are charged with – much like the consequences when a shepherd neglects the basic priorities (food and water, rest, security) they are responsible for with respect to their flock.

Nearly four hundred years after the reign of David, the kingdom of Israel finds itself conquered (many times over) and exiles are living in the foreign land of Babylon. While several prophets are active in this exilic period, the prophet Ezekiel speaks directly to the leaders who are neglecting their responsibilities in the eyes of God. In the 34th chapter, the prophet begins:

“The word of the Lord came to me: ² ‘Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?’ ³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.’”¹²⁴

Ezekiel goes on to list in detail the manner in which the shepherds (leaders) of Israel have fallen short of their duties to both God and the people they lead. Referring back to the basic responsibilities of a shepherd, Ezekiel references derelictions that have occurred. They have failed to take care of the weak, to bring back those who have strayed, or to search for the lost. The word Ezekiel shares highlights that the people were ruled “harshly and brutally”.¹²⁵ The resulting consequence then is not simply that the leader, or shepherd, would suffer, but in fact those for whom the leader was responsible would ultimately become victims to those who would

¹²⁴ Ezekiel 34:1-3

¹²⁵ Ezekiel 34:4

take advantage of them. Like sheep, they became spoils for the victor, and “they were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them”.¹²⁶ There was no one left to shepherd them.

In yet another example of deliverance, God intervenes on behalf of His flock. He reclaims the position of shepherd, committing to finding his flock and drawing them back to him. The prophet shares the manner in which God will restore his people¹²⁷, binding up their wounds¹²⁸, leading them to green pastures¹²⁹, and declaring a covenant of peace¹³⁰. In doing so, “they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign Lord”.¹³¹

It is in this stark contrast in the example of a good and bad shepherd that we recognize the mode of leadership required in the economy of God. In David’s case, the imagery and lessons learned from his time as a shepherd of sheep helped to shape his leadership among the people Israel. Though imperfect, it was his humbleness in the presence of God that created the environment in which God and His people might possibly fulfill the requirements of the covenant they shared. But it was David, as a shepherd, that guided that relationship in a transformational manner. For many of the kings that followed David, the adherence to a shepherd mindset was completely lost on them, and they viewed their position and power from a purely transactional perspective. God reclaims that title in the prophecy Ezekiel shares amid one of the most tragic moments of Jewish history to that point.

¹²⁶ Ezekiel 34:6

¹²⁷ Ezekiel 34:13

¹²⁸ Ezekiel 34:16

¹²⁹ Ezekiel 34:14

¹³⁰ Ezekiel 34:25

¹³¹ Ezekiel 34:30

The archetype of the Good Shepherd, though not always expressly stated as such, would be sustained from that point forward. Prophets continued to reference the actions of leaders through the lens of shepherds. Inevitably, the leaders they referenced did not measure up. It was an image that was understood and hoped for among the Jewish people and would be claimed in dramatic fashion within the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Gospel of John contains more references to shepherds than any other book in the Bible.¹³² In the tenth chapter of John, Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles after sending his disciples before him. John claims that Jesus intended to make his way to Judea in secret¹³³, but he quickly found himself teaching in the temple courts drawing the attention of the Pharisees. Through a series of events prior to the tenth chapter, Jesus finds himself speaking in parables directly to the Pharisees. Drawing from the common imagery of the shepherd that would have been familiar to all within earshot, Jesus launches into a brief introduction that infers the basic responsibilities of the shepherd¹³⁴ by indicating that any who would circumvent that – specifically failing to enter through the gate – is not a (the) shepherd. Shepherds, according to Jesus, are identifiable because they enter through the gate. After laying the groundwork, Jesus presses the point further by asserting, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.”¹³⁵ Jesus continues in his discourse not only boldly stating he is the way to the Father, but that he is the one who will lead the people as a shepherd would lead his flock.

Twice in this interaction with the Pharisees, Jesus not only refers to himself as a shepherd, but he also names himself the “Good Shepherd”.¹³⁶ Commentators continue to

¹³² (Richter 2020)

¹³³ John 7:10

¹³⁴ (Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* 2006)

¹³⁵ John 10:7

¹³⁶ John 10:11; John 10:14

disagree as to whether this section (vss. 7-18) is a continuation of the first six verses, with Jesus simply expanding upon previous “I am” statements found earlier in John’s Gospel,¹³⁷ or an explanation of the first six verses. If understood in this manner, the first six verses would then be seen as a parable with the succeeding 12 verses offering the manner in which Jesus himself is the focus of this particular parable.¹³⁸

Regardless of how one chooses to view the pericope, there is no doubt that Jesus is alluding to the earlier referenced passage in Ezekiel. Unlike the kings/shepherds of Israel that were derelict in their duty to God and the people they led, Jesus is committed to the security and well-being of those he leads. He is embodying what it means to be the Good Shepherd, to look after his Father’s flock in the manner described by the prophet Ezekiel. As the gatekeeper, he is plainly asserting that he is the means by which the sheep are saved. They will find “green pastures” following his leadership. He will provide security in a way that the hired hand simply won’t. Jesus, in foreshadowing his eventual death and resurrection, asserts that as the Good Shepherd, he “lays down his life for the sheep”.¹³⁹ In what must have been an already confusing exchange, Jesus also adds that he has “other sheep that are not of this pen. [He] must bring them also. They will listen to [his] voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd”,¹⁴⁰ making obvious reference to his inclusion of Gentiles in the vision of God’s Kingdom. As both shepherd and gatekeeper, Jesus is boldly stating his role in the greater *mission Dei*, to serve as an atonement not only for the Jewish people but for the Gentile as well.

¹³⁷ i.e. John 6:41, 6:48, 6:51

¹³⁸ *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Volume VI* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995) pgs. 668-673.

¹³⁹ John

¹⁴⁰ John 10:16

One note of interest in Jesus taking hold of the Messianic title of the Good Shepherd is in regard to Jesus' prediction of the betrayal of Peter.¹⁴¹ In both accounts found in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus, as the Good Shepherd predicts the impact of his imminent arrest and crucifixion on his disciples. Careful to not leave his disciples without a word of hope, he also includes his seemingly cryptic response.

²⁷ "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written:

*"I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.'*

*²⁸ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."*¹⁴²

Unlike the kings described by the prophet Ezekiel, the Good Shepherd never wavers from his commitment both to his flock or the mission for which he was sent. Death itself cannot deter Jesus from his shepherding role or from the salvific work (as gatekeeper) for which he came in the first place.

Shepherding Today

The example and framework of the shepherd as understood in the biblical witness informs our current understanding of the responsibilities as well as potential for leadership in the

¹⁴¹ Found in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27

¹⁴² Mark 14:27-28

contemporary church. Most often, the title of shepherd is meant to relate to those with a pastoral position in the church. Taken in a broader sense, small group leaders, program ministers, and caretakers of various entities in the church might also share in being referred to as shepherds. Given the distinction made earlier in this work of leader versus leadership development, and the focus on the latter prioritizing social capital over individual capital, it is necessary at this point to explore how shepherding might be practiced in a modern context. Specifically, how does shepherding as a concept correlate with leadership development?

We have already posited that all people (and by extension groupings of people) undergo some type of formation. In the case of the church, that would presumably be a spiritual formation process and intentional behavior modification that was aimed at discipleship.¹⁴³ If in fact the church at its best occurs in deliberate pursuit of the Great Commission, then understanding the role of the church in terms of shepherding provides instructional guidance. Care must be taken though so as to not fall into the trap that befell so many of the kings of Israel following David. While the church might have been established by God – like the kings of Israel – it has the capacity to both operate for the glory of God as easy as it does itself when priorities are askew.

The symbols that we use in the church have power. It is significant that for thousands of years the shepherds crook has been a symbol of leadership across cultures.¹⁴⁴ For the church, the crook is symbolic of more than the person who holds the episcopal office, it also serves as a reminder for the church as a whole of its responsibility to provide nourishment, security and rest¹⁴⁵ to the flock God has entrusted to her. The church serves as partner and helpmate for the

¹⁴³ (Tennant, *The Making of the Christian* 2005)

¹⁴⁴ (Richter 2020)

¹⁴⁵ (Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* 2006)

redemptive work exemplified in Jesus. The turn as to whether the church fulfills its role in a “good” or “bad” sense might be somewhat dependent then on how the church views its mission field.

First, the church has to understand itself as an incubator for transformation. Failure to do so can quickly create an environment whereby the relationship between church and flock can become overwhelmingly transactional, like that between the service provider and consumer. Too often, the church opts to serve those who walk in her doors...the low hanging fruit. There is a level of comfort offering ministry within the walls that also allows for a modicum of control. Any pastor who has officiated weddings within the church as opposed to an offsite destination wedding understands this reality. But in the end, opting to have such a narrow scope of focus is effectively denying the redemptive power of the cross. This is not a matter of conservatively managing the ministries offered through the church. Instead, such a witness lacks faithful leadership or belief that Jesus will actually operate as the gatekeeper that leads to greener pastures. At its worst, such a predisposition sets the conditions for building up the influence of a specific church or its leaders above that of the freedom offered in the Kingdom of God. Adopting the role of “bad” shepherd is an easy move for the church that is increasingly inward focused.

A possibility for the church to maintain its focus is to understand itself as under shepherd to the Good Shepherd Jesus. While it might appear to be an obvious assertion, all too often Jesus and the focus on making disciples are notably absent in the analysis of too many churches. The Great Commission directs the church to make disciples of all people, not just those who happen to make their way through the doors. A more audacious possibility presents itself in the execution of full servant leadership and its ability to reproduce itself. “Servant Leadership calls

for leaders to motivate followers to serve others by demonstrating an example of servanthood and by nurturing those tendencies in followers.”¹⁴⁶ When servant leadership is realized in this fashion, it resembles the methodology by which generations of shepherds hand down the knowledge and values (spiritual formation and behavior modification) to subsequent generations of shepherds. The similarities in methodology for the nurturing of the shepherd and development of the servant leader provide at least a framework upon which to build. But such a framework must also be given direction lest the temptation to turn inward and self-serving might become overwhelming. The imperative from Jesus to “go into all the world”¹⁴⁷ supplies a more than sufficient direction. This ambitious imperative requires a synthesis of aptitudes as well as attitudes in order to be accomplished. It might be the latter that is most crucial in pursuit of living out the mission of the church.

Consider the stewardship example outlined earlier. In the model offered, it was proposed that traditional stewardship campaigns were generally focused on one aspect of our discipleship – generous giving. From the perspective of the congregant (aka disciple, member of the flock, sheep) this is a vital aspect of the relationship between the individual and God. But from the perspective of the church, without careful attention to its shepherding responsibility, the stewardship campaign can become a mechanism for serving the purposes of the church above all else. When concern for salaries, utility bills and facility upkeep supersede the mission of the church, this is a quick indicator that the focus is turning inward for the church. This is not to say that these items are not important, but when they become the driving purpose for the actions of the church employed by its leadership, there needs to be a course correction. This can be viewed in similar ways to the conduct of the former kings of Israel. When King David was at his best,

¹⁴⁶ (Farling, Stone and Winston 1999)

¹⁴⁷ Matthew 28:19

he never neglected the needs of the people he led or the kingdom, nor did he lose focus on his relationship with God. As a shepherd (maybe even understood as an under shepherd to the Lord), he recognized that his example would greatly influence the flock he was entrusted to lead.

In seeking to live into the new stewardship model, the example of the shepherd plays a robust role. Like the shepherd in the field, more attention is given to the experience of the desired marks of discipleship. Rather than the stewardship campaign simply serving as a measurement for what the church can expect from its membership, the reclaimed model understands the roles and responsibilities of shepherd and flock in a sense. For each individual (whether baptized Christian or not), there is a deliberate shift to returning to our place as disciples, rather than consumers or mere supporters of an institution. But for the church (as the institution), the role might be a complete shift from what had previously been practiced. Rather than collecting pledge cards to gain some measure of what the church can expect from its membership, the new stewardship tools (Figs. 1 and 2) and orientation allow the church to have insight into the needs of its flock. Just as a shepherd knows the unique needs of individual sheep, this tool allows the church the opportunity to identify and address perceived and real needs as stated by each person in the congregation, and potentially beyond the walls of the church. Implementing such a dramatic reversal in information gathering, combined with a conscious understanding that the church serves as under shepherd to Jesus the Good Shepherd, the church has the potential to create significant impact in leadership development. The primary focus is no longer what the member does for the church, but what the church is doing (shepherding) to empower followers of Jesus (disciples). Incubation for leadership development begins to take shape as social capital creation is emphasized.

In Search of Shepherds

In conversations with members of various churches and leaders who have faithfully led their congregations, there is often a subconscious feeling of disconnection between the church and the people it seeks to serve. For the most part, spiritual formation (sermons, bible studies, small groups) is focused on the faithful actions and beliefs of each individual. Research in other areas indicates this is a highly Western perspective (most predominant in the United States) – namely to be focused on the development of the individual over that of the group, community or institution. In reimagining how stewardship might be presented and practiced, there exists an underlying premise that the same discipleship lessons and expectations that are applied to individuals can rightly be applied to the institution of the church as well. Therefore, it is not an accident that the imagery and legacy of the shepherd as exemplified in scripture is essential in understanding the role of the church. Considering the deep care that (good) shepherds display in the care of their flocks, the church might be well suited to remember what Jesus plainly stated when pressed by the recognized religious leaders of his day:

36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Matthew 22:36-40.

It is imperative that the church cultivate its rich heritage of discipleship (leadership) development. At the same time, such development methodologies must also be nurtured in the spirit of the shepherding tradition. The dual charge of the shepherd demands the mindful care of the flocks they are responsible for as well as the persistent pursuit of a vision and mission beyond themselves. Considering the mandates Jesus gives to love God and neighbor, it follows that such love would embolden us to exercise those mandates beyond the walls and structures of the church. In the case of the institution of the church, it might also suggest that there be an intentional trust endowed to the very same disciples it empowers to participate in God's Kingdom building process of disciple-making. What happens then when those empowered disciples begin to exercise their ability to shepherd others outside the confines of the formal church? In other words, what might leadership (discipleship) development look like when disciples of Jesus are called to shepherd others "throughout the world"?

Shepherding Beyond the Walls of the Church

Dr. Daniel Salzwedel¹⁴⁹ has spent his career and retirement years as a recognized leader and educator among his peers. Dr. Salzwedel began his professional career as a coach and teacher, two roles which describe both his character as much as they do his occupation. He spent time as a basketball coach at the high school and college level, taught English and eventually utilized those experiences to shift his professional focus to education administration.

¹⁴⁹ Father of Todd Salzwedel

Throughout the many iterations of his career and beyond, he never forgot what he understood to be the most essential title he held – role-model.

Dr. Salzwedel serves as an example of what is possible when discipleship is unleashed beyond the walls of the church. His example is not unique in the sense that he is the only person to put into practice what he understood as discipleship reflected in aspects of his life other than his church involvement. To be sure, there are countless stories and testimonies of faithful followers of Jesus that have done so much to serve their communities and fellow man. Instead, his story is simply readily available. It provides a clear example of the generational mentorship that discipleship models in the church can accomplish when correctly applied and executed. Given our relationship, I am intimately aware of the influences and shepherds that played a pivotal role in his formation (spiritual and otherwise) and behavior modification. Similarly, I have spent a lifetime learning from him the lessons that his shepherds so graciously shared.

Two such shepherds that heavily influenced Dr. Salzwedel, and by extension me, are themselves former basketball coaches. The first, Dr. James Naismith, is in fact credited with being the inventor of the game of basketball. While many would recognize him for his development of a favorite pastime and spectator event, it was his life and the impact it had on others that was far more significant.

Orphaned at the age of nine years old, James would come to be cared for by relatives along with his sister and brother. He would find work in lumber camps and by the age of 15 he dropped out of school to help provide for his family. Like King David, James had a turning point in his life at the age of 19 that would forever shape his character and provide direction for his actions from that point forward. Walking into a bar for the first (and only) time in his life, he was recognized by another patron as the son of the saintly Margret Young. When the patron

stated his mother would be ashamed to know he was there in the bar, James set his glass of whiskey down determined to never be an embarrassment to his family ever again.¹⁵⁰

Eventually, James would return to school to acquire his high school diploma enrolling in McGill College immediately afterwards with the intent of becoming a Presbyterian minister. While in college, James exhibited a keen acumen for athletics, excelling in several sports. While his athletic accomplishments were impressive, it was the impact he had on his teammates that proved to be more substantial. Multiple accounts of his very presence changing the way people spoke and acted around him demonstrated the immense respect he had garnered from those around him.

James was not content to finish his first degree and move on. Instead, he understood his hunger for knowledge as a longing from God that was ultimately to be utilized for the benefit of others.¹⁵¹ By the time James finished his studies, he had earned no less than four doctoral degrees (theology, education, psychology as well as becoming a medical doctor).

Dr. Naismith was never content with the way things currently sat. As is the case with any leader, he always saw things the way they could be rather than accept how they currently were. His perspective on life applied to everything he did – even with respect to the game he is so famous for inventing. Dr. Naismith's grandson Ian¹⁵² shared several times that shortly after Dr. Naismith posted the original thirteen rules on the wall of the Springfield, Massachusetts YMCA gym in December of 1891, he made a modification in order that his new game might impart a lesson much more substantial. The new rule Dr. Naismith enacted required players to pass the

¹⁵⁰ Naismith, Ian. "The Best Sportsman I Never Knew" (Chicago, IL: Naismith International Basketball Foundation); Rains, Rob, and Hellen Carpenter. *James Naismith: The Man Who Invented Basketball*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

¹⁵¹ (Rains and Carpenter 2009)

¹⁵² Ian was a personal friend of our family and would readily share stories and accounts of his grandfather as personal information regarding Dr. Naismith was not always readily available.

ball a minimum of three times prior to taking a legal shot. The reason for this was simple in his mind. He wanted his boys to remember the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Dr. Naismith was intuitively practicing spiritual formation among the students in his care using the tools available to him at the time.

In time, Dr. Naismith would be brought to the University of Kansas where he would accept the role of school pastor and athletic director. In their search, a former teammate of Dr. Naismith, Amos Alonzo Stagg, was asked if he could recommend a person for the position. Stagg replied quickly, “James is a medical doctor, a Presbyterian minister, Tee-totaler, all-around athlete, nonsmoker, and owner of a vocabulary without cuss words”.¹⁵³

While at Kansas, Dr. Naismith started the basketball program and ironically compiling the only career losing record of any coach in the school’s rich history. But it was the activities away from the school that exemplified what discipleship looks like outside the walls of the church. Dr. Naismith never wavered from his conviction that his life was best lived in service to others. He exemplified the tenets of the biblical shepherd regardless of setting or circumstance. Each Sunday, Dr. Naismith preached at a number of churches that could not afford their own preacher. He made house calls as a country doctor. In 1916, he rode with General Pershing in the war with Pancho Villa, and continued his chaplain duties in 1917 during World War I. Almost two decades later, he would stand before leaders at the Berlin Olympics introducing the sport he created and the values he proposed it could impart in the presence of Hitler with the world watching. Even in that setting, Dr. Naismith never shied from his convictions nor his faith, regardless of the potential consequences.

¹⁵³ (I. Naismith n.d.)

Dr. Naismith embodied what it meant to be a shepherd of the resources he was entrusted with, guided by a grand mission to use all of the tools at his disposal to espouse that which was most important to him – his faith. Prior to the scholarship and interest in leadership development, Dr. Naismith simply lived out the lessons learned as a disciple of Jesus. He endeavored to be a lifelong student of his faith and the world around him. He was compelled to share his passions and gifts with others. And like other great spiritual leaders of the past, he never let the walls of the church dictate where and when ministry could take place. Decades later, another shepherd, influenced by the example and mentorship of Dr. Naismith would carry on the same tradition.

John Wooden, like Dr. Naismith, was born on a farm to humble means. Like Dr. Naismith, Wooden quickly excelled in athletics and academics, with a proclivity towards history and poetry. Another foundational similarity Wooden shared with Dr. Naismith was a strong spiritual background. Identifying some of the spiritual mentors, or shepherds, who influenced Wooden throughout his life is somewhat easier as Wooden often acknowledged them in public. His father Joshua played an early and pivotal role in his spiritual formation and provided a sturdy foundation upon which Wooden would expand as he took on the mantle of shepherd.

Coach Wooden relays in his book *They Call Me Coach* some of the formative experiences that shaped his outlook on life and his attitude in service to others. Early on in the book, Wooden credits his father with laying the groundwork for the men John and his brothers would become. One specific recollection took place when John graduated from grade school in Centerton, Indiana. His father gifted him “a piece of paper on which he had written a creed that he suggested I try to live by.”¹⁵⁴ The creed read:

¹⁵⁴ (Wooden and Tobin, *They Call Me Coach* 2004), pg. 24.

1. Be true to yourself.
2. Help others.
3. Make each day your masterpiece.
4. Drink deeply from good books – especially the Bible.
5. Make friendship a fine art.
6. Build shelter against a rainy day (faith in God)
7. Pray for guidance and counsel and give thanks for your blessings each day.¹⁵⁵

Coach Wooden would copy that creed in subsequent years to new pieces of paper, adding a few other nuggets of wisdom shared by his father. Eventually, this card would include a poem by Rev. Henry Van Dyke and Coach's famous "Two sets of 3's". *Never lie, never cheat, and never steal* serve as reminder that character and integrity are essential in your relationship with others. *Don't whine, don't complain and don't make excuses* help shape one's attitude.¹⁵⁶

Much like the life and legacy of Dr. Naismith, it is common for people to focus on the achievements associated with Coach Wooden and his infamous UCLA Bruin basketball teams. Undoubtedly, Coach Wooden compiled a resume as a player and coach that deserve respect. But by his own words, he never measured his own success by way of wins and losses. Instead, Coach Wooden defined success in a manner that seems more congruent with stewardship than achievement. "Success is peace of mind which is the direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Copies of this card are available through the John R. Wooden Course at www.johnwoodencourse.com. I've carried one in my wallet for more than twenty years.

you did your best to become the best you are capable of becoming.”¹⁵⁷ Coach Wooden created his definition of success while coaching and teaching in Martinsville, Indiana in 1934. This definition would be the litmus test by which he measured his own life and would invite others he shepherded to aspire to as well.

Coach Wooden understood that it was not sufficient to simply put forth a definition of success without also providing a methodology to pursue it. His solution took the form of a pyramid comprised of blocks and mortar representing values and principles he felt were essential as well as faithful. As his co-author Jay Carty wrote, “Coach developed the building blocks and mortar to stand biblical scrutiny...The principles laid down in the bible produce good in people and societies.”¹⁵⁸ Throughout his life, Coach Wooden used the pyramid as a teaching tool with his students and his players. He was upfront about the fact that the genesis of these values and principles was rooted in his own Christian faith. Regardless of the faith (or lack thereof) of any of his students and players, he was steadfast that these practices could aid any person in their life.

Maybe one of the best measures of a shepherd in the biblical sense is their ability to hand the baton from one generation to the next. Obviously, such a transfer requires deliberate thought and training. Much like the biblical shepherds of old, experience and mentorship provide the most fertile teaching opportunities for the next generation. Coach Wooden understood this concept well. His players often noted that there was very little coaching that went on during the game. Preparation beforehand was of utmost importance in order that players felt they had prepared for any contingency they might encounter. Former player like Bill Walton, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (aka Lou Alcindor) and Walt Hazzard all recall the last words he would share with

¹⁵⁷ Wooden, John R. and Jay Carty. *Coach Wooden's Pyramid of Success* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell Publishing, 2005) Kindle edition.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. Introduction to the Pyramid of Success

the team as they exited the locker room prior to the start of every game: “I’ve done my job, now you go and do yours.”¹⁵⁹

Jesus final instructions to his disciples in the Great Commission convey a similar message. Jesus addresses the fact that all authority is given to him in heaven and earth, but the task of going into the world to make disciples is given to those he has trained, much like a coach. Coach Wooden never expected his students or players to give more than he himself was willing to give. Likewise, Jesus empowers his followers without demanding more of them than they were capable of. His instructions indicate that he has done all that he came to do. The further implication is that due to his efforts on their behalf, they have all they need to accomplish the mission set before them. And like the shepherds of the field, the experience and training they impart to others should be shared from one generation to the next.

When this same idea is applied to the church as shepherd, it follows that the church needs to live by the same expectations it has of its flock. By doing so, a new level of trust is possible. It results in a relationship that is not characterized by positional authority. Rather, there is an expectation of empowerment that *all* disciples contribute to realization of the Kingdom of God. When fully realized without constraint, shepherds are sent forth into the world empowered to continue in the discipleship development process. The church as incubator participates in the development of shepherds that are not limited in the exercise of stewardship to be contained within the formal confines of the church. Instead, they are encouraged to live out an often-dismissed aspect of the Great Commission to *go* into all the world and continue the process they themselves were shaped by. The covenantal nature of this model reinforces “the informal relationship between leader and follower, where followers are affirmed and recognized as being

¹⁵⁹ (Wooden and Tobin, *They Call Me Coach* 2004)

empowered.”¹⁶⁰ The result then is an incubator for leadership development, a discipleship engine, and a laboratory from which to be sent in all the world.

¹⁶⁰ (Fischer and Schultz 2017-10-1)

Where Do We Go from Here?

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. ”¹⁶¹

The thesis of this work contends that the very same expectations and principles that are taught to those who follow Jesus Christ as disciples are also rightly applied to the institution of the church. The guiding principle – the mission - that guides the work of the church and the disciple can be summarized in the Great Commission. At times, the Great Commission has been understood as applying to the ordained, the clergy who serve the church and the mission field. It follows that pastoral nature of the work of clergy would relate to the shepherding language so prevalent in scripture. Just as the Great Commission has come to be applied to include the broader Body of Christ, so too has the potential role of shepherd been extended to all disciples of Jesus at some level. To be sure, both the ordained and the laity have a role to uphold in the mission laid out by Christ for all his followers to undertake. In order for such a bombastic mission to take place though, a crucial element for execution remains – leadership.

There is no doubt that leadership by individuals is of paramount importance. Additionally, the manner in which new leadership is both cultivated and conveyed is of equal importance for the continuation of any endeavor. In the case of the church and the Great Commission, this conversation or paper would not be occurring if leadership in an ecclesial sense had not conveyed to others over the last two thousand years.

¹⁶¹ Matthew 28:19-20

Today, we can take for granted the vast amount of information and research with respect to leadership and its development. The truth is that the field of research regarding leadership itself is only about a century old. The more specific field of servant leadership is roughly half as old, with the very phrase being coined by Robert Greenleaf in the early 1970's.¹⁶² Conventional wisdom and history itself demonstrate that leadership has always existed in some form, though our understanding of its nuance and potential continues to expand.

Implicit in this work is an assertion that the church has been in the business of leadership development all along. While the descriptions might be different and the explanations more suited to a pastoral setting, the results speak for themselves. Management of people and resources has been a hallmark of the economy of God from the onset of creation itself. We just call it stewardship. Likewise, we witness a long tradition of leadership development (discipleship) within the ecclesial setting, though sometimes we neglect to recognize it as such due to our often-confusing descriptions and programmatic presentations. While there is much to be gained from current scholastic engagement around the topic of leadership, it is imperative that the church not simply substitute secular models and measures of success in place of the faithful pursuit of the mission that Jesus unleashed his disciples for in the first place.¹⁶³ Like the role of the shepherd since ancient times, each of us as Jesus disciples have been tasked with the responsibility and opportunity to pass on the collective knowledge, the covenant relationship, and vision for the Kingdom of God from one generation to the next.

Whether the gifts of instruction, doctrine and nurturing passed down throughout the ages are explicitly labeled as leadership or not, the result is still the same. Just as it might be stated that the function of leadership is to create new leaders, that primary objective has existed for the

¹⁶² (Burns 1978)

¹⁶³ Namely, to carry out the Great Commission

church from its very inception for disciples to go into all the world to make more disciples all throughout the world. As such, the church must boldly reclaim its function as an incubator of transformation in society utilizing discipleship (leadership) as simply a natural outgrowth rather than an aspirational hope. This was the case for the church in several eras past and can be again when we seek after the needs of others before ourselves. The church can itself “lead” by remembering the practices of old that served to shape and form our spiritual predecessors.

This is not to say that there is nothing that can be gleaned for use in the church from modern scholarship and practice in leadership and other areas. To state otherwise would be both arrogant and naïve. Instead, the church has much to contribute to society beyond itself and to absorb in the continued development of transformational leadership. The very aim of leadership development – the building of social capital¹⁶⁴ - is foundational to the genesis and mission of the church.

So, what’s next then? Throughout this study, various rabbit trails of research have illuminated the various ways in which the most well-intentioned individuals and organizations have gone astray and sought some remedy to provide a course correction. This is not foreign to the experience of the biblical narrative nor the expression of the church over the past several thousand years. Most of the different models and paradigms explored though have simply been derivative of already utilized methods the church has had long experience employing. Examples of biblical leaders (i.e. David, various kings of Israel, Peter) echo the experiences of contemporary leaders who have lost their way, allowing self-serving priorities and temptation to cloud their judgment. The church offers a solution to this in the person of Jesus Christ. Through repentance, a refocusing of purpose, and recollection of what it means to be connected to others

¹⁶⁴ (Day 2001)

beyond oneself (covenant), the church offers a methodology by which redemption and growth (personal and communal) are possible.

Just as Peter vigorously argued that he would never deny Jesus,¹⁶⁵ we must begin from the position that others intend to keep their word and serve something beyond themselves. Of course, Peter failed that very evening, denying Jesus three times before the next morning sun rose. It's a scenario of falling short that we watch play out every day in the media and our local communities, maybe even our own lives. The difference in the example of Peter is that this instance is not how he is ultimately remembered. This experience, like that of witnessing the transfiguration of Jesus, the feeding of the multitudes, raising Lazarus from the dead - and countless other miraculous and formative events – provided a laboratory of learning by which Peter was transformed. It was the totality of these experiences, shared without reservation, that aided his monumental influence on the early church and extends to us today. Each experience, and the accompanying lesson, provided an opportunity for Peter to be sanctified in his relationship with God and others. When Peter was spot on in his handling of matters and ministry, he was quick to direct attention to the one who made such acts possible. But when he fell short, he was equally quick to turn to God for correction and mercy.

The example Peter offers to us is a methodology by which we need not fear failure or mistakes, but rather move boldly into the future confident God will be going before us. In fact, the church should be safest place for us to fail. By God's grace, when one of the flock falls short, the church, like a shepherd, needs to be there to provide nourishment, security and rest. It needs to be a place of safety where mentorship in the faith is dominant and the castigating of others is non-existent. This is not to say that there is no place for accountability. Instead, we

¹⁶⁵ Matthew 26:31-35

must hold ourselves and the institution of the church to the highest of standards. Those standards must include - maybe above anything else - the same forgiveness and love present in Jesus.

So, go, and make disciples in your homes, your workplace and in all the world. Live into your baptismal vows to be the disciples God claims us for and serve others in the same manner of servant leadership Jesus exhibited in the Upper Room when he took the form of a servant washing his disciple's feet. Let your example serve to mentor others in how to live into a relationship with God and the world in a manner that transcends our own wants and desires. In doing so, may our actions measure up to the mandate Jesus gives to love God with all that we are and to love our neighbors as ourselves. And know that none of us travel along this leadership journey alone. We are part of a great body of witnesses that have gone before us, blessed with fellow sojourners in this present time, and working towards a vision that only God can fully comprehend and see. We are all invited to join with God in this divine mission of transformation.

Epilogue

Context matters. In every place and time, there are circumstances and events that shape how societies and individuals perceive the world around them. As I began the exciting journey of researching this project a mere month prior to a worldwide pandemic, there was no way I or anyone else could foresee the impact such an event would have on individual lives, communities

or nations. Truthfully, the original conception of this project was vastly different from what ended up on the page. But in the midst of ever-changing dynamics on an almost daily basis, there might never have been a more bountiful time to observe leadership in action. In some sense, the ever-changing landscape is at the very heart of the need for leadership, for shepherding, and for discipleship. This is not to say that all observed leadership was always “good” though. Like the “good” and “bad” shepherds of scripture, there were definitely examples to draw from. If there has ever been a time in my life where courageous and bold leadership was necessary in the life of the church, the period of March 2020 to March 2021 surely fit the bill.

Leadership insights for team development from practitioners like Patrick Lencioni¹⁶⁶ and best practices as highlighted by Jim Collins¹⁶⁷ were sure to play a more prominent role in this intended work in February of 2020. Their contributions still aided the understanding of this work, but in a manner not anticipated prior to the unprecedented events the world has experienced. Unexpectedly, the more esoteric area of leadership study centered around adaptive leadership¹⁶⁸ proved to be both timely and profound.

It was within the chaos of the unknown that helped to direct this study even more though. Without the capability to meet in person for such a long period of time, the longing for community forced us to re-examine what it was that we were really doing in the practice and life of the church. An honest assessment of the energies expended in the life of the church pre-pandemic painted a picture that was not pleasant to behold. In the absence of community

¹⁶⁶ (Lencioni 2012)

¹⁶⁷ (Collins 2001)

¹⁶⁸ See authors like Ron Heifetz and Tod Bolsinger

worship, too many churches found their reason for being challenged in fundamental ways. It was a truly existential crisis for many.

In my own ecclesial setting, I was pleased to recognize we fared better than many others. It was quickly evident that without the presence of our church, there was much more missing in the life and service of the community than Sunday morning worship. Feeding programs serving more than 1500 meals monthly to the homeless, respite care ministries and the church facility serving as a community launching pad demonstrated the adaptability and resilience of a community guided by discipleship above consumerism. And yet, there was, and still remains, much in the way of discipleship development that needs to be accomplished. Being confronted by such a monumental crisis forced the church to quickly clarify its priorities and reason for being. Prayers were fervently offered, and God continues to answer and guide.

All of this is to say that my assumption is that were I to undertake this project a year earlier or a year later than I have, I am confident the direction and analysis I have arrived at would be vastly different. Of course, I also assume that this is the point of such an exercise at some level in the first place. The study of leadership development, like spiritual formation and discipleship, is never static. The dynamic nature of life demands that we be ever vigilant in our epistemological endeavors.

If anything, this work has elevated my desire to continue to grow in knowledge, but more importantly to seek after wisdom. Applying the work articulated here is sure to result in an ever-growing understanding of the world around me. While some questions have been answered for me, to be sure, there have been exponentially more that have embedded themselves in my mind. Regardless, the role of discipleship and shepherding are sure to play a pivotal role in my own ongoing spiritual development and discipleship.

On an even more personal note, this study has profoundly highlighted for me the importance of mentorship and role-modeling. The following poem is one I carry in my wallet to remind me of the mentors in my life as well as those I'm blessed to lead.

Walk a Little Plainer Daddy

Walk a little plainer, Daddy,
Said a little boy so frail.
I'm following in your footsteps,
And I don't want to fail.
Sometimes your steps are very plain,
Sometimes they are hard to see,
So walk a little plainer, Daddy,
For you are leading me.

I know that once you walked this way
Many years ago,
And what you did along the way,
I'd really like to know.
For sometimes when I am tempted,
I don't know what to do.
So walk a little plainer, Daddy,
For I must follow you.

Someday when I'm grown up,
You are like I want to be.
Then I will have a little boy,
Who will want to follow me.
And I would want to lead him right,
And help him to be true.
So walk a little plainer, Daddy.
For we must follow you.

Author Unknown

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