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Corporate Worship and the Mission of God
Tensions that Complicate All-Level Discipleship

By
Benjamin John Horseman

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

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in every area of life and the tensions that impede this connection. Many Christians in the United States have separated corporate worship from mission. They have replaced God's call to love and serve others with an individualistic approach to the Christian faith.

This study utilized a basic qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with six pastors from various denominations who regularly plan worship services and care about Christian mission. The interviews focused on gathering data with four research questions about worship practices and the mission of God. These questions guided the interviews, and the data was sorted using the constant comparative method.

The literature review focused on four key areas to understand the connection between worship and mission, including a biblical framework of Christian mission, a biblical understanding of salvation, the connection between salvation and worship, and three culture shifts that have affected corporate worship services.

This study concluded that worship services play a vital role in helping congregants embody the mission of God in the world. Biblical worship influences every area of life and compels Christians to practice all-level discipleship. This study recommends that pastors see discipleship as the primary purpose of the worship service. Ideally, this mindset will bring about spiritual growth for the believer and leave space for potential Christians to encounter the Triune God.

The practices of Christian worship function as the altar of Christian formation, the heart and soul, the center of gravity of the task of discipleship.

— James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Bible calls followers of God to fulfill a specific mission in the world. The LORD chooses Abram and his descendants to bless all people groups.¹ Jesus elaborates on this task, sending his followers out into the world to make disciples, bring people into the community of God, and serve the people around them.² The Apostle Paul describes this task as “the ministry of reconciliation.” As new creations, Christians live as Christ’s ambassadors in the world.³ Like their Savior, followers of Jesus must look for practical ways to sacrificially love and serve “the least of these” in their midst.⁴ According to the Bible, this vocation to bless and serve others demonstrates what it means to follow Jesus.

Today, however, pastors face a growing problem within the American church. Ideologies that prove contrary to the Great Commission in Matthew 28 have found their way into the worldviews of many professing Christians. Consequently, churchgoers have neglected this outward-focused, missional calling and replaced this “call to serve” with an individualistic, self-serving mindset. These church attenders expect to encounter God in dynamic, entertaining, and encouraging ways during a worship service, but they fail to

¹ Gen 12:1-3.

² Matt 28:18-20.

³ 2 Cor 5:17-20.

⁴ 1 John 3:16-18.

see how this encounter should compel them to participate in Christian mission.⁵ In fact, they assume that the primary role of the Church is to meet their individual needs.

A study from the Pew Research Center substantiates this claim. 1 in 4 church attenders said that they will not go to a church that they do not like, and 1 in 5 refuse to attend if they do not like the sermons.⁶ Describing this reality Sayyid Qutb ash-Shaheed, 20th century Islamic scholar, suggests, “They [Christians] go to church for carousal and enjoyment, or, as they call it in their language, ‘fun’ . . . it is a place for meeting and friendship, and to spend a nice time.”⁷ This individualistic and self-serving approach to the Christian faith disrupts the Church’s ability to live out its God-given missional calling.

Scott McConnell, the Executive Director of LifeWay Research, also points to individualism’s negative impact on Christian discipleship. He notes, “Many churchgoers profess faith in Jesus Christ but are not putting that faith into action,” and this inaction is evidenced by a lack of giving in a local church context.⁸ Of the 247 million U.S. citizens who identify as Christians, only 1.5 million tithe. Religious giving has fallen 50% since

⁵ The data supporting these claims will be given below.

⁶ “Why Americans Go (and Don’t Go) to Religious Services,” Pew Research Center, accessed September 17, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/08/01/why-americans-go-to-religious-services/>.

⁷ Sayyid Qutb ash-Shaheed, “‘The America I Have Seen’: In the Scale of Human Values (1951)”, accessed March 1, 2025, https://www.cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound/3F/3F56ACA473044436B4C1740F65D5C3B6_Sayyid_Qutb_-_The_America_I_Have_Seen.pdf.

⁸ Scott McConnell, “Churches, Religious Organizations Face Shrinking Pool of Donors,” Lifeway Research, accessed September 19, 2021, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/08/03/churches-religious-organizations-face-shrinking-pool-of-donors/>.

1990.⁹ In fact, based on a 2019 study from Indiana University’s Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, on average, families gave more during the Great Depression than they do currently.¹⁰ This decrease in giving shows a step away from the mission-minded community outlined in the Bible.

The Problem: Individualism and its Effects

In this research study, the term “individualism” will have a particular definition. Contemporary philosophers and professional academics Steve Wilkens and Mark Sanford define individualism as “the belief that the individual is the primary reality and that our understanding of the universe and lifestyle should be centered on oneself.”¹¹ Several assumptions follow from this mindset. First, people are autonomous, which allows them, first and foremost, to pursue their own needs, wants, and desires. Consequently, men and women are primarily concerned with themselves and rely on others only if it helps them fulfill their individual needs.¹² One potential consequence of this individualistic mindset within the Church is that faith becomes purely personal, relegating involvement in a local congregation to a secondary concern.¹³ Wilkins and Sanford note how this makes people

⁹ Alina Tugend, “Donations to Religious Institutions Fall as Values Change,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/06/giving/donations-to-religious-institutions-fall-as-values-change.html>.

¹⁰ Joe Carter, “Fewer Americans Give to Charity (and to Their Churches),” The Gospel Coalition, accessed March 14, 2025, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/fewer-americans-give-charity/>. According to the article, during the Great Depression, families gave 3.3% of their income to their local church. In 2018, that number dropped to 1.3%.

¹¹ Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories The Shape Our Lives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 27.

¹² Wilkens and Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews*, 27–29.

¹³ Wilkens and Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews*, 29.

their own personal idols. As their personal false gods, believers place their own needs above God's purposes in the world.¹⁴ Such thinking goes against the call for love and service found in the Christian gospel. This individualistic mindset separates faith from God's call for His Church to participate in His mission.

How we Got Here — The Enlightenment, Jack Kerouac, and “The Road”

Solutions to this problem begin by understanding how an individualistic worldview came to prominence within the American church. As a pastor who writes on the intersection between faith and culture, Mark Sayers provides one possible explanation. Sayers traces the rise of individualism in the United States back to the writings and ideology of beatnik author Jack Kerouac. Kerouac assumed that individuals find true happiness living a transient life of self-discovery, searching for pleasure in new experiences.¹⁵ Sayers describes this mindset as “The Road.”¹⁶ Throughout the 20th century, as more and more people bought into the philosophy of the road, happiness and self-fulfillment became life's primary goals.¹⁷ Love became a feeling to experience for one's own benefit and not a choice, commitment, or discipline.¹⁸ With this mindset, if a relationship or activity became boring or unpleasurable, it is a person's right and duty to change course and find something more pleasurable in his or her pursuit for personal

¹⁴ Wilkens and Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews*, 42.

¹⁵ Mark Sayers, *The Road Trip That Changed the World: The Unlikely Theory That Will Change How You View Culture, the Church, and Most Importantly, Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 23.

¹⁶ Sayers, *The Road Trip*, 38.

¹⁷ Sayers, *The Road Trip*, 50.

¹⁸ Sayers, *The Road Trip*, 41–42.

freedom.¹⁹ Commenting on this dilemma, Sayers argues, “The road has made us fickle. It has made our faiths weak. It has made us spoiled. To state it in its most brutal and blatant form, the road is ruining our lives, and it is ruining our culture. It has left us lost and directionless, consumers not followers of God.”²⁰ This lost, directionless, consumeristic approach to faith contributes to an emphasis on the individual person within the Church.

In *Missional Church*, missiologist and theologian Darrell Guder and others give another reason for how this individualistic mindset spread within the western church. Guder points to the Enlightenment’s emphasis on human autonomy. Within the Enlightenment mindset, individuals become duty-bound to discern truth and construct knowledge for themselves.²¹ With this shift, faith and belief become personal and private.²² As such, the more public aspects of church life, including the call to serve the least of these, are deemphasized. Individualism affects the Church in several ways.

The Effects of Individualism in the Church

Guder describes many negative trends within the western church brought about by the individualistic Enlightenment mindset and the philosophy of “The Road.” For example, individualism transforms the Church into a “vender of religious services and

¹⁹ Sayers, *The Road Trip*, 42–44.

²⁰ Sayers, *The Road Trip*, 53.

²¹ Darrell L. Guder et al., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 23. For more information see Immanuel Kant’s “What is the Enlightenment?” found at https://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/kant_whatisenlightenment.pdf.

²² Guder et al., *Missional Church*, 78.

goods.”²³ Many detrimental consequences follow from this belief. First, church attenders assume that the church exists to meet their individual and personal needs. They believe that the primary purpose of their local churches’ programs is to make them happy and comfortable. This self-centered emphasis leaves little room for Christian mission and community engagement. Worshippers come to church buildings as consumers and spectators, not participants, and fail to consider the work that Jesus calls them to complete outside of the church walls. Theologian Kenda Dean summarizes this point well, arguing, “Churches have perfected a dicey codependence between consumer-driven therapeutic individualism and religious pragmatism.”²⁴ According to Dean, this individualism acts like a termite, gnawing away at orthopraxy and prohibits Christians from fulfilling the call to serve as the body of Christ in the world. Believers have replaced Jesus’ radical, outward-focused call to love and serve the least of these with a gospel of “self-fulfillment and self-actualization.”²⁵ This false gospel reinforces an individualistic mindset, conditioning congregants to expect their local churches and pastors to meet their needs, without much regard for Christian mission.

Second, an individualistic worldview reduces the American church’s understanding of salvation. As the West became more individualistic, believers began to see salvation as primarily a personal reality, ignoring its cosmic and comprehensive

²³ Guder et al., *Missional Church*, 84.

²⁴ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University, 2010), 5.

²⁵ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 5.

dimensions.²⁶ Missiologist and biblical scholar Michael Goheen calls out this problem directly, writing, “It [salvation] is misunderstood as a spiritualized one-to-one relationship of the human soul with God.”²⁷ While one’s personal relationship with Jesus is important, it is not an end to itself. The Bible shows that God calls and forgives His people so He might empower and equip them to bless their communities. An individualistic theology that downplays this call prohibits Christians from living out their missional vocation.

Lastly, individualism places a Christian’s faith into the private sphere of personal beliefs.²⁸ Missiologist Lesslie Newbigin writes extensively on this trend. The post-Enlightenment world made religious faith a matter of one’s private beliefs or values. Consequently, religious claims and doctrines no longer had universal implications in the “world of facts.”²⁹ The Church accepted this false dichotomy between the “public world of facts” and the “private world of values.” When faith became primarily a personal value, it gave up practical relevance in the public sphere.³⁰ Consequently, Christians could compartmentalize their faith into a personal and private piety that only mattered one day a week. This resulted in Christianity losing its missional edge, as believers failed

²⁶ Guder et al., *Missional Church*, 92. The comprehensive nature of salvation will be discussed in the literature review below.

²⁷ Michael W. Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 30.

²⁸ Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 49.

²⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 35–41.

³⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 35–38.

to live out their faith convictions in their day-to-day lives. Moreover, this development influences how non-Christians view the Church.

How Non-Christians View an Individualistic Church

An individualistic mindset within the Church keeps Christians from carrying out their God-given mission in the world. Researcher David Kinnaman and the Barna Research Group notes many of the opinions that non-Christians have about professing believers. In this study, 49% of outsiders had a negative view of Christianity.³¹ Out of that 49%, 87% of “young outsiders” viewed Christians as judgmental, and 85% saw the Church as hypocritical.³² One out of five outsiders admitted they “have had a bad experience in a church or with a Christian that gave them a negative image of Jesus Christ.”³³ Summarizing his frustrations with Christianity, one outsider notes:

Christians have become political, judgmental, intolerant, weak, religious, angry, and without balance. Christianity has become a nice Sunday drive. Where is the living God, the Holy Spirit, an amazing Jesus, the love, the compassion, the holiness? This type of life, how I yearn for that.³⁴

These words point to two dual realities within the American church. First, followers of Jesus have a reduced and compartmentalized understanding of the faith. This means that they seek personal convenience over Jesus’ call to love and serve others, leading to negative perceptions of Christians. Second, it shows how this nonbeliever longs for

³¹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 25. Kinnaman and Lyons define outsider as any person who is “looking at the Christian faith from the outside.” See page 17 for more details.

³² Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 27.

³³ Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 31–32.

³⁴ Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 35.

something more. While this person rejects a “Sunday drive” Christianity, he or she wants Jesus’ followers to live out the all-encompassing mission presented in the New Testament. Goheen and scholar Jim Mullins define Christian mission as “God’s continuing work to restore creation and to our own active participation in the work.”³⁵ The Church must remember this call to mission as it moves into the future.

Purpose Statement

With this problem in mind, this study will explore how pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in every area of life.³⁶

Research Questions

The following questions guided the qualitative research:

1. In what ways do pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in public life?
2. How do pastors describe the connection between worship practices and embodying the mission of God in every area of life?
3. What church worship service outcomes do pastors observe in congregants?
4. What church worship service outcomes do pastors desire to observe in congregants?

³⁵ Michael W. Goheen and Jim Mullins, *The Symphony of Mission: Playing Your Part in God’s Work in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 3.

³⁶ “Embody the mission of God in every area of life” means that the Christian identity shapes all aspects of daily living. Christians who embrace this understanding pursue a mission-minded lifestyle, seeking opportunities to reflect and share the way of Jesus through both words and actions, within and beyond the local church. This paper will refer to such a lifestyle as a “lived apologetic,” a term that emerges from the concept of “all-level discipleship.”

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for those who want to see the Church fulfill its God-given call to mission in the world today. It seeks to encourage pastors who have trouble with getting their congregants to engage their communities and participate in outreach opportunities. It also hopes to provide metrics for discipleship. The New Testament makes the connection between individuals' beliefs in God and their actions in the world. Paul describes this action as "the fruit of the Spirit."³⁷ Jesus, too, references fruit and implies that radical acts of love mark genuine believers.³⁸ Likewise, James makes the connection between legitimate faith and practical acts of service in the world.³⁹ It seems, then, that practical acts of service and regular participation in mission efforts provide helpful metrics for discipleship within a church context. Lastly, this study hopes to help the Church remain relevant in a post-Christian context. In a culture that values authenticity and service, Christians will need to show people why faith practically matters and benefits their local communities. Newbigin writes, "The only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it."⁴⁰ The lives of Christians should evidence the gospel's transforming power in the world. This study wants to help and equip pastors, church leaders, and congregants to take that call seriously.

³⁷ Gal 5:22-23.

³⁸ Matt 7:15-20; John 13:35.

³⁹ James 1:27, 2:14-26.

⁴⁰ Newbigin, *The Gospel*, 227.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore how pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in every area of life. This literature review begins with a study on passages from Scripture that outline a biblical missiology. While many passages exist and will be mentioned throughout this paper, primary focus will be given to Genesis 1 and 2, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, and Romans 12:1-2. Then, three relevant areas of literature will be addressed to provide a foundation for qualitative research. The literature areas consist of a biblical understanding of salvation, the connection between salvation and worship, and culture shifts that have impacted corporate worship services.

A Biblical Framework of Christian Mission

The Bible describes the mission of God as a holistic and all-encompassing activity. After the resurrection, Jesus commands his followers to go as His witnesses to the ends of the earth.⁴¹ In a post-resurrection appearance in John's Gospel, Jesus sends His followers into the world to carry out the mission that He began with His life, death, and resurrection.⁴² Both of these commands come with the promise of the Holy Spirit's empowering presence, as believers, equipped by the Spirit, embody the mission of God in

⁴¹ Acts 1:8.

⁴² John 20:21.

every area of life. We see this theme of God’s mission in both the Old and New Testaments.

Biblical Mission in Genesis 1 and 2

The mission of God begins with the original mandate for humankind outlined in Genesis 1 and 2. Biblical scholar Peter J. Leithart describes creation as “a sanctuary for God’s image.”⁴³ He explains that God built worship and mission into the very fabric of the physical world. Leithart notes, “God fills His temple with liturgical materials and utensils. He creates a watery world, calls plants from the ground, forms animals from the earth. Every one of these things is destined for inclusion in worship.”⁴⁴ Moreover, the creation of humankind links human identity with Christian mission and worship practices. In Genesis 1:26-28, God sets men and women apart as His image-bearers, commanding them to fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion over the rest of creation.⁴⁵ Old Testament scholar Christopher J.H. Wright suggests that to “bear God’s image” speaks to identity and what it means to be human.⁴⁶

In his commentary on Genesis, Old Testament scholar Gordon J. Wenham elaborates on what it means to bear God’s image. Pointing to the kingly nature of this act, he notes, “Images of gods and kings were viewed as representatives of the deity of the

⁴³ Peter J. Leithart, *Theopolitan Liturgy* (West Monroe: Theopolis Books, 2019), 4.

⁴⁴ Leithart, *Theopolitan Liturgy*, 5.

⁴⁵ Gen 1:26-28.

⁴⁶ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 119.

king.”⁴⁷ Psalm 8 echoes this idea, describing humanity as beings “crowned with glory” and created by God to rule over His creation.⁴⁸ This rule involves care and stewardship, as ancient kings worked for the welfare of their people, including marginalized communities.⁴⁹ Wright explains that the “primary duty of kingship was to serve them [their subjects], to care for their needs, provide justice and protection, and avoid oppression, violence, and exploitation. A king exists for the benefit of his people, not vice versa.”⁵⁰ Jesus says that when His followers care for the less fortunate, they are ultimately serving Him.⁵¹ Thus, human beings’ roles as image-bearers imply service to God for the sake of His creation, which become acts of worship.

Old Testament scholar C. John Collins shows how this service plays out practically. For Collins, men and women should use their God given intelligence and intellect for the sake of cultivating creation. He paraphrases Genesis 1:26 in this way: “Let us make man to be our concrete resemblance, to be like us.”⁵² Collins notes that this resemblance allows men and women to work and design the world in intelligent ways.⁵³ This point speaks to how followers of Jesus should act in everyday life. Sharing a likeness with God allows them to create, work, and enhance creation. Wright maintains

⁴⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 31.

⁴⁸ Ps 8:4-8.

⁴⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 33.

⁵⁰ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 122.

⁵¹ Matt 25:31-40.

⁵² C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2006), 66.

⁵³ Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 66.

that as God’s image-bearers, all people have the capacity to bring about good in the world. They exist in relationship with all of creation, and this relationship is marked by stewardship. By caring for creation, men and women live out what it means to serve and worship God as His image-bearers.

Wright shows how humankind’s set-apart status in creation is linked to worship and mission. God entrusts humanity to represent Him in the world, which is a part of what it means to participate in the mission of God.⁵⁴ Collins makes a similar point, showing that bearing God’s image allows men and women to live in a loving relationship with creation that is marked by a commitment to serve.⁵⁵ This call to serve creation becomes a theme throughout the biblical narrative and ties worship and mission together.

Genesis 2 elaborates on how humankind represents God to creation. In verse 15, God places man in the Garden of Eden to “work it and take care of it.”⁵⁶ The Hebrew words in this verse imply a religious connotation that joins together the worship of God with His mission in the world.⁵⁷ In Leviticus 17 and 18, God calls His people to protect the holiness of the community and the sanctity of its worship.⁵⁸ Numbers 1:53 picks up on this theme, as the LORD commands the Levites to care for the tabernacle. These worship practices echo the call for humanity in Genesis 2:15. Because the Levites served as God’s priests, Genesis 2 implies that human beings serve as God’s “priests” in the

⁵⁴ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 123.

⁵⁵ Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 66.

⁵⁶ Genesis 2:15.

⁵⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 67. For Wenham’s biblical support, see Lev 17:9, Num 1:53, Num 3:7-8, Num 4:23-26, and Deut 4:19.

⁵⁸ Lev 17:8-9; Lev 18:5.

world in every area of life. Wenham suggests that like the Hebrew priests, men and women should strive to protect creation from evil and look after it.⁵⁹ Thus, the creation accounts in Genesis show that God built worship into what it means to be human. They also connect worship with embodying the mission of God in every area of life.

Similarly, Philosopher James K.A. Smith talks about worship and mission in Genesis. Smith suggests, “The end of Christian worship brings us back to the beginning of creation, to our commissioning in the Garden and our deputizing as God’s image-bearers, those responsible for tending and tilling God’s good—but now broken—creation.”⁶⁰ These words imply that worship helps congregants live out God’s original intention for humankind at creation. Smith insists that worship services should remind participants of this mandate in Genesis and equip them to embody the mission of God in the world.⁶¹ Wright, too, picks up on this idea. He writes, “We care for creation because we love the God to whom it belongs and because we long to see God’s glory enhanced through creation.”⁶² Likewise, Leithart explains, “The first temple is supposed to get better. It’s eventually going to be a glorified city-temple. And human beings are the ones who make it better.”⁶³ The earliest pages of the Bible connect worship and mission together. Passages in the New Testament, too, address the connection between worship and God’s mission in the world.

⁵⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 67.

⁶⁰ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 2.

⁶¹ Smith, *Imagining*, 2.

⁶² Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 127.

⁶³ Leithart, *Theopolitan Liturgy*, 5.

Biblical Mission in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 speak to how believers should embody the mission of God in every area of life. New Testament scholar Ernst Käsemann describes this passage as “an exposition on ministry.”⁶⁴ He notes several features of this passage to make his point. For example, these verses summarize the work that God calls all His followers to do in the world. For the Apostle Paul, this ministry work is all-encompassing, as believers live as God’s new creations in the world. This language implies that the original mandate at creation to protect and care for God’s world is still present but with a new and enhanced dimension. God built mission into the fabric of creation, and this theme continues through the concept of new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18.

The ideas in this passage have both a present and future component. Paul joins what God is currently doing in the world through His Church with what He promises to accomplish in the future. New Testament scholar Raymond Collins explains that Paul has God’s future in mind when writing these verses. Drawing on Paul’s language in verse 17, Collins argues that these words point to the all-encompassing restoration of creation.⁶⁵ In addition, he shows that Paul alludes to visions from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, in which the prophet talks about God’s promise and commitment to renew creation.⁶⁶ The Apostle believes that this work began with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Collins notes, “Paul sees the eschatological expectation of a new creation as being fulfilled in

⁶⁴ Raymond F. Collins, *Second Corinthians*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 114.

⁶⁵ Collins, *Second Corinthians*, 120.

⁶⁶ For examples, see Isa 42:9, 43:18-19, 65:17, and 66:22.

Christ . . . the new order of things has come into existence and continues to come into existence, even as it has not yet been fully realized.”⁶⁷ Paul’s use of the perfect tense implies that Christ’s death and resurrection continues to influence the present world.⁶⁸ God, in Christ, continues to make things new, and in the verses that follow, Paul insists that God does this through His people. Collins shows that God’s “new creation” work and mission go together. Followers of Jesus participate in God’s ministry of reconciliation, as they live as Christ’s ambassadors in their communities.⁶⁹ Collin’s words tie the saving work of Jesus with His transformative power and the mission of God in the world. As such, the Bible connects salvation with worship and missional living.

Goheen and Mullins elaborate on this point about personal salvation and mission. They write, “When the apostle Paul uses the language of ‘reconciliation,’ he describes what God is doing not only *for* us but *through* us. We are reconciled to God in Christ; we become a new creation and then are commissioned to join his work of reconciliation.”⁷⁰ Goheen and Mullins’ words bring together salvation and mission. God saves His people so they can participate in His work of reconciliation. This work affects every area of life, as believers “provide a foretaste of the future shalom that Jesus will fully establish when he returns.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Collins, *Second Corinthians*, 121.

⁶⁸ Collins, *Second Corinthians*, 121.

⁶⁹ 2 Cor 5:18-19.

⁷⁰ Goheen and Mullins, *The Symphony*, 29.

⁷¹ Goheen and Mullins, *The Symphony*, 29.

Biblical Mission in Romans 12:1-2

Paul's words in Romans 12:1-2 elaborate on this idea of a holistic understanding of mission that influences every aspect of life. New Testament scholar Michael J. Gorman describes this chapter as “the Christian *habitus*,” or the “set of dispositions, values, and practices that reflect the gift of Christ.”⁷² According to Gorman, Paul's language ties this habitus or way of life to worship practices. Followers of Jesus become a “living sacrifice,” which replaces the temple sacrifices of the first century world.⁷³ James D.G. Dunn, another New Testament scholar, makes a similar point. Dunn writes, “The service God looks for transcends the bounds of cult—it is the commitment of every day.”⁷⁴ The singular form of the noun “sacrifice” and Paul's plural audience implies that this is both an individual and corporate endeavor.⁷⁵ For Gorman, this sacrificial worship, then, is both an individual act and a communal offering of the body of Christ.⁷⁶

Moreover, the word “body” has an all-encompassing component. Gorman insists that Paul is not talking about flesh and blood but the whole person living out cross-shaped love in the world.⁷⁷ For Dunn, the Apostle's point is not only about the individual person but his or her relationships in a community.⁷⁸ These scholars show that the act of

⁷² Michael J. Gorman, *Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2022), 242.

⁷³ Gorman, *Romans*, 244–45.

⁷⁴ James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, vol. 38B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 708.

⁷⁵ Dunn, *Romans*, 38B:709.

⁷⁶ Gorman, *Romans*, 245.

⁷⁷ Gorman, *Romans*, 243.

⁷⁸ Dunn, *Romans*, 38B:709.

worship affects every area of life on both an individual and communal level. “This worship,” notes Gorman, “does not occur only in specific places or at specific times; it is, rather, the liturgy of life. Worship for Christians is a 24-7 way of living.”⁷⁹ Paul’s words in Romans 12:1-2 broaden a biblical understanding of worship to include human action in the world. He elaborates on this idea throughout the rest of the chapter.

The scholarship shows that as God transforms the minds of His people, they live differently in the world.⁸⁰ Gorman suggests, “The result of transformation is that people experience the glory of God and the righteousness for which humanity was created.”⁸¹ He, then, discusses Paul’s words, explaining how this happens in practical ways. Followers of Jesus are called to humbly use their specific spiritual gifts to fulfill the work of the Church.⁸² For Gorman, this means that they show genuine love to the people around them, serve God zealously, exhibit joyful attitudes, and practice hospitality for all people.⁸³ He explains that God calls His transformed followers to pursue peace in their relationships, let go of revenge, and show forgiveness to insiders and outsiders alike.⁸⁴ For Gorman, Paul’s train of thought in Romans 12 suggests that God sanctifies men and women to share His glory and way of life with the people around them. Moreover, the Apostle connects this calling and mandate to cultic worship practices. As such, the

⁷⁹ Gorman, *Romans*, 245.

⁸⁰ Gorman, *Romans*, 243.

⁸¹ Gorman, *Romans*, 244.

⁸² Rom 12:3-8.

⁸³ Rom 12:9-11.

⁸⁴ Rom 12:17-21.

literature supports the claim that living on mission in the world is a part of how followers of Jesus worship Him in their day-to-day lives.

Moreover, Romans 12:2 insists that God empowers His people to live on mission. It is His power alone that enables the people of God to love and serve others. “Be transformed” is a passive verb, which implies that God acts on and changes the hearts of His people.⁸⁵ Dunn’s scholarship substantiates the point that Christian mission happens because of God’s divine mercy.⁸⁶ For Dunn, believers do not rely on their own strength or power to live missionally but instead partner with God. God is the one who saves, forgives, calls, and equips His people. God brings about salvation in people, which compels them to live differently in the world.⁸⁷ Paul makes this point in 12:2. God changes people so they will not be conformed to the patterns of the world. Dunn shows that this dual call to not “be conformed” is both a present imperative and divine passive.⁸⁸ God works and transforms the hearts of His followers, allowing them to resist the ways of the world. In addition, God both forgives and empowers His followers and enables them to embody His mission in every area of life.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Gorman, *Romans*, 243.

⁸⁶ Dunn, *Romans*, 38B:709.

⁸⁷ Phil 2:12-13.

⁸⁸ Dunn, *Romans*, 38B:712.

⁸⁹ More thoughts on a biblical understanding of salvation will be shared below.

Summary of A Biblical Framework of Christian Mission

This section presents a biblical framework of Christian mission, linking Christian worship with God's mission in the world. The opening pages of Scripture in Genesis 1 and 2 tie human beings' roles as God's image-bearers with practical acts of service. They care for their communities and look after creation. The Apostle Paul picks up on this idea in his letters. God invites His people into the all-encompassing ministry of reconciliation.⁹⁰ As new creations, empowered by the Holy Spirit, men and women work in anticipation of Jesus' return and the renewal of creation. As followers of Jesus carry out this work, they serve as a "living sacrifice." These sacrificial acts become moments of worship that influence every area of life. This truth means that worship occurs both inside and outside the walls of a church or during a corporate worship service. Every act done for God's glory becomes an opportunity to worship Him.⁹¹

A Biblical Understanding of Salvation

In the previous section, a brief treatment of biblical Christian mission was given, using passages from both the Old and New Testaments. The Bible joins God's mission with His saving work in the world. This section will discuss the biblical understanding of salvation. Then, it will consider how this understanding informs the biblical ideas of God's kingdom, God's mission, and how the early church lived out this missional call in the world.

⁹⁰ 2 Cor 5:16-21.

⁹¹ 1 Cor 10:31.

The Meaning of Salvation

The Bible presents a holistic understanding of salvation. Salvation is the saving act of God. Scripture shows that God initiates salvation and then empowers those He saves to participate in His redemptive work.⁹² Bible scholars Christopher Morgan and Thomas Schreiner make this point, noting that God planned salvation before creation itself.⁹³ Salvation is God’s gracious gift, and thus, begins with Him choosing people for Himself.⁹⁴ God saves men and women so they can experience reconciliation and a relationship with Him. Morgan and Schreiner note, “We are never the source, ground, or cause of our salvation; God is. He is the Savior; we are the saved. He is the redeemer; we are the redeemed.”⁹⁵ God chooses and saves people from sin by His grace for the work that He calls them to do in the world.⁹⁶ Consequently, the Bible connects God’s election with His mission in the world.⁹⁷

The literature notes how the Holy Spirit plays a role in this process. It is the Spirit who transforms, equips, and empowers God’s people.⁹⁸ Morgan and Schreiner make this point, writing, “The new life isn’t produced in our own strength or from our own resources or by straining with all our might to be good. The fruit is produced as we walk

⁹² Eph 2:8-10; Phil 1:6.

⁹³ Christopher W. Morgan and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Salvation* (Brentwood: B&H Academic, 2024), 17.

⁹⁴ Morgan and Schreiner, *Salvation*, 17.

⁹⁵ Morgan and Schreiner, *Salvation*, 411.

⁹⁶ Eph 2:1-10.

⁹⁷ Morgan and Schreiner, *Salvation*, 411.

⁹⁸ 1 Cor 12:7-21; Gal 5:13-26.

in the Spirit . . . taking step by step at the Spirit's direction."⁹⁹ God initiates salvation, calls men and women into His mission, and then, empowers them to carry it out. This understanding of salvation means that God does not save people for the sake of themselves. He saves people to work with Him in their day-to-day lives. Thus, God's salvific work influences every area of life, which makes it comprehensive.

The Bible presents a comprehensive understanding of salvation. In the Old Testament, salvation has spiritual, social, economic, political, natural, and physical components.¹⁰⁰ *In Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Wright supports this claim. He notes how God chose and blessed Abraham's descendants so that they could be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.¹⁰¹ This influences their relationships with other people in the social realm. This blessing, too, involves bringing and embodying God's righteousness and justice in the world.¹⁰² This act will have economic, political, natural, and physical effects. Wright refers to this mission as a "universal agenda" for all of creation.¹⁰³ God's plan involves using His people to fulfill His will, or to "create a new community of people who in their social life would embody those qualities of righteousness, peace, justice, and love that reflect God's own character and were God's original purpose for humanity."¹⁰⁴ Ideally, Israel's relationship with God and knowledge

⁹⁹ Morgan and Schreiner, *Salvation*, 235.

¹⁰⁰ Goheen and Mullins, *The Symphony*, 23.

¹⁰¹ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 49–50.

¹⁰² Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 50.

¹⁰³ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 50.

¹⁰⁴ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 51.

of His character influenced how they lived. The Israelites would obey God and carry out His will in every area of life.¹⁰⁵

Wright elaborates on the comprehensive nature of salvation. For example, he cites Israelite economics and land ownership in the Old Testament. The Israelites used their land to promote economic stability between the twelve tribes. The land was divided up between clans and could not be bought or sold commercially.¹⁰⁶ According to Wright, this provision helped ensure equality between families and protected the most marginalized members of Israelite society.¹⁰⁷ Old Testament scholar Norbert Lohfink supports Wright's claim, noting:

Yahweh intends that Israel be a nation of sisters and brothers in which there will be no more poor (cf. Deut. 15:4) . . . the new society that Yahweh creates out of the poor Hebrews through the Exodus is not only in contrast to the Egyptian society they have left behind, but beyond that it is in contrast to all other existing societies in their world.¹⁰⁸

These words speak to the social dimension of salvation. God saves the Israelites and calls them into a new way of living. In response to salvation, they model this way of life in contrast with the other nations. Ideally, this points different people groups back to the one true God, that they might experience His righteousness, justice, and blessing for the sake of all people. Wright notes, "They [the Israelites] were not only the bearers of redemption but were to be a model of what a redeemed community should be like, living in

¹⁰⁵ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 56. See Josh 1:15 and Lev 25 for more detail.

¹⁰⁷ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 56.

¹⁰⁸ Norbert F. Lohfink, *Option for the Poor: The Basic Principle of Liberation Theology in the Light of the Bible* (Berkeley: BIBAL, 1987), 45.

obedience to God's will."¹⁰⁹ God's people experience holistic salvation, bringing about their obedience and a commitment to participate in His mission.

The New Testament, too, presents a comprehensive understanding of salvation. For example, Ephesians 2:1-3 address the reality of people apart from God's salvation. They are spiritually dead, but God, out of mercy, saves them, granting grace and forgiveness.¹¹⁰ In response, they complete good works in the world, and God's saving act influences every area of life.¹¹¹ Similarly, Luke's Gospel outlines the practical effects of comprehensive salvation. Jesus' mission involves good news for the poor and freedom from oppression.¹¹² In Luke 4, Jesus mentions "recovery of sight for the blind," and His healing ministry throughout the gospels points to the physical component of salvation.¹¹³ Other healing and miracle stories confirm His power over the natural world.¹¹⁴ Lastly, Jesus spoke out against economic injustice.¹¹⁵ Wright explains that Jesus' disciples would participate in the same type of work.¹¹⁶ As such, salvation calls believers to action.¹¹⁷ By the power of the Holy Spirit, they live out this missional work as agents of God's kingdom.

¹⁰⁹ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 62.

¹¹⁰ Eph 2:1-9.

¹¹¹ Eph 2:10.

¹¹² Luke 4:14-19.

¹¹³ Luke 4:18.

¹¹⁴ Mark 4:35-41.

¹¹⁵ Luke 19:45-47.

¹¹⁶ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 72.

¹¹⁷ See Eph 2:1-10 for more details.

New Testament scholar Beverly Gaventa touches on a common mistake in many American churches when it comes to salvation. Discussing the “I language” in the book of Romans, she suggests, that many interpretations “are influenced by a large dose of American individualism.”¹¹⁸ For Gaventa, many American Christians see salvation as a transaction between God and the individual.¹¹⁹ While salvation involves individuals, this reduced understanding fails to present the complete picture that the Bible gives. Gaventa insists that the biblical authors emphasized the wellbeing of the collective group over the individual in the group.¹²⁰ She writes, “Salvation concerns God’s powerful action in Jesus Christ to claim humanity, individual and corporate, from the [cosmic] powers of Sin and Death . . . until God’s final triumph, the redemption of the whole of creation.”¹²¹ These words mean that salvation is more than the forgiveness of individual sins. Biblical salvation is holistic, as God delivers His people from Sin’s power.¹²² Gaventa notes that God saves individuals, grants them victory over sin, and allows them to participate in His mission. God’s people work as agents of His kingdom on earth. Thus, this comprehensive, holistic understanding of salvation fits within a biblical framework of the kingdom of God. This paper will briefly address how that informs an understanding of God’s kingdom and what that means for Christian mission.

Holistic Salvation and The Kingdom of God

¹¹⁸ Beverly Gaventa, *When in Romans: An Invitation to Linger with the Gospel According to Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 28.

¹¹⁹ Gaventa, *When in Romans*, 28.

¹²⁰ Gaventa, *When in Romans*, 29.

¹²¹ Gaventa, *When in Romans*, 41.

¹²² Gaventa, *When in Romans*, 43.

Salvation involves the coming of God’s kingdom, which is a prominent theme within the New Testament. Jesus teaches His followers to pray for God’s kingdom to come on Earth.¹²³ In Mark 1:15, Jesus announces the coming of this kingdom in his life, death, and resurrection as the good news or gospel.¹²⁴ According to missiologist Lesslie Newbigin, the kingdom’s coming will, ultimately, involve a cosmic renewal of creation.¹²⁵ With this theme in mind, Goheen insists, “Salvation is the restoration of creation from sin and its curse.”¹²⁶ This definition of salvation influences how believers understand the gospel. For Goheen, salvation includes both individuals and all of creation. It, too, has implications for the world today. While the curse of Sin remains present in creation, Jesus gives people a glimpse of that future hope that is “somehow now and not yet,” and believers participate in God’s restoration project until it is fully realized at the end of the age.¹²⁷ The coming of God’s kingdom and the salvation He brings call believers to participate in the holistic mission of God.

Holistic Salvation and the Mission of God

God’s kingdom impacts every area of life.¹²⁸ Paul’s letters to the believers in Corinth support this claim. He urges them to see every daily activity as an opportunity to

¹²³ Matt 6:10.

¹²⁴ Michael Goheen, *The Church*, 42.

¹²⁵ Goheen, *The Church*, 43.

¹²⁶ Goheen, *The Church*, 28.

¹²⁷ Goheen, *The Church*, 45. For a biblical description of that future reality see Rev 21:1-5.

¹²⁸ Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 57.

glorify God.¹²⁹ Because of Jesus' resurrection, God will use every aspect of our mission work for his purposes.¹³⁰ Moreover, He entrusts us, as ambassadors or representatives of His kingdom, with His ministry of reconciliation.¹³¹ Paul's language in these pages pushes against any notion of a compartmentalized faith. Instead, God's holistic mission should flow into every area of life, as His followers work as citizens of His kingdom and participate in His kingdom work. Guder talks about this all-encompassing call, writing, "As we live under God's reign, our involvements with the world are repatterned."¹³² We see this reality lived out in the early days of the Jesus movement.

Mission in the Early Church as a Response to Salvation

The early church responded to God's holistic salvation by embodying holistic mission as a part of worship. In *The New Testament and the People of God*, N.T. Wright, a New Testament scholar and church historian, substantiates this claim. He notes, "Mission and sacrament both came into focus at the very centre [sic] of the church's life, that is, its worship."¹³³ Wright's words confirm that early followers of Jesus had a broad understanding of worship. For them, worship is not an act that occurs solely in a church building as a part of a worship service. Instead, worship changes the way that Christians live in the world. Wright goes on to give practical examples. Early Christians loved their oppressors and treated their enemies as friends. They practiced hospitality, caring for

¹²⁹ 1 Cor 10:31.

¹³⁰ 1 Cor 15:58.

¹³¹ 2 Cor 5:18-20.

¹³² Guder et al., *Missional Church*, 105.

¹³³ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 362.

widows, orphans, and strangers. Moreover, they cared for the poor and gave money to those in need.¹³⁴ “Early Christians,” Wright suggests, “took it for granted that in the details of their behavior they should be significantly different, in clearly defined ways, from their pagan neighbors.”¹³⁵ This commitment evidences a holistic, mission-minded identity in the early days of the Church.

This missional identity involved practical acts of love and service, regardless of class or background. Church Historian Bruce Shelly notes, “Christian love was probably among the most powerful causes of Christian success.”¹³⁶ Shelly notes the practical ways that believers loved their neighbors. They cared for the marginalized, visited prisoners, and funded the burial services for the dead. These early followers, too, looked after others during famine, earthquakes, and war.¹³⁷ In his commentary on Ephesians, the early church father Ignatius confirms Shelly’s point. Ignatius writes, “Allow them [nonbelievers] to be instructed by you, at least by your deeds. In response to their anger, be gentle; in response to their boasts, be humble, in response to their slander, offer prayers.”¹³⁸ Similarly, Athenagoras defends Christians by highlighting their actions in the world. For him, early followers of Jesus exhibited good works and give to the needy.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Wright, *The New Testament*, 363.

¹³⁵ Wright, *The New Testament*, 363.

¹³⁶ Bruce Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 45.

¹³⁷ Shelly, *Church History*, 45.

¹³⁸ Ignatius, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Coxe Cleveland, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1 (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885), 10.1-3.

¹³⁹ Edward Smither, “Learning from Patristic Evangelism and Discipleship,” in *The Contemporary Church: Case Studies in Ressourcement* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 35.

They defended the faith by embodying the mission of God in the world or a “lived apologetic.”¹⁴⁰ These acts confirm the early church’s commitment to mission, which brought about explosive growth in the 1st and 2nd centuries.

Summary of a Biblical Understanding of Salvation

The Bible presents a holistic understanding of salvation. God’s saving power extends to individuals, but also to all of creation. Equipped by the Holy Spirit, the Church serves as a glimpse of God’s kingdom on earth, that all might respond to the gospel and experience God’s saving grace. Goheen and Mullins put it this way, writing, “The church has become a foretaste of new life and now bears it in every part of the world for the sake of all nations.”¹⁴¹ As such, God calls His people to embody this missional calling. The research shows that missional living occurred in the early church, and every generation of Jesus’ followers must strive to live out this same mission. A holistic understanding of salvation helps followers of God better understand God’s mission. Salvation, too, influences the way Christians think about worship.

Salvation and Worship in the Church

This holistic understanding of salvation influences a biblical understanding of worship. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, the Apostle Paul writes, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” This verse implies that every action provides an opportunity to give God glory. Because salvation affects every area of life,

¹⁴⁰ A fuller treatment of “lived apologetic” will be given below.

¹⁴¹ Goheen and Mullins, *The Symphony*, 25.

worship, too, impacts every area of life. As mentioned, Paul makes this point in Romans 12:1. In response to God’s grace and mercy, he urges followers of Jesus, to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice. This act, according to Paul, serves as “true and proper worship.”¹⁴² Thus, all of life provides opportunities to worship.

Smith elaborates on this point. He writes, “We worship for mission; we gather for sending; we center ourselves in practices of the body of Christ for the sake of the world; we are reformed in the cathedral to undertake our image-bearing commission to reform the city.”¹⁴³ According to Smith, corporate worship should influence how Christians live outside of the church walls. This section will consider the purpose of worship gatherings and how they help worshippers embody the mission of God in every area of life. While corporate worship serves a variety of purposes in the Church, this study will address three of them: experiencing God’s presence, forming disciples, and enabling a lived apologetic.

Purpose #1: Experience God’s Presence

Worship services provide opportunities for men and women to experience God’s presence. This encounter is a vital part of believers living out their missional calling. Goheen and Mullins note, “Before we can love God and make known his love to the world, we must encounter the love of God for ourselves.”¹⁴⁴ God meets His people through a variety of ways during the worship service. Through sermons, followers of Jesus consider truth revealed in the Bible. The literature shows that as congregants hear God’s Word preached, ideally, they come away with practical ways to apply biblical

¹⁴² Rom 12:1.

¹⁴³ Smith, *Imagining*, 154.

¹⁴⁴ Goheen and Mullins, *The Symphony*, 45.

teaching to their lives. Newbigin argues that the sermon allows followers of God to experience the presence the Holy Spirit in a worship service. The Spirit works through the words of Scripture and gives them life. Newbigin insists that through the words of the Bible, the Holy Spirit changes the hearts of worshippers and how they live in the world.¹⁴⁵ This act is one example of how worshipers experience God’s presence in a worship service.

In addition, people experience God’s presence by responding to him in a worship service. Singing songs, reciting creeds, moments of call-and-response, and other acts, like communion, help the congregation participate. These acts allow God’s people to follow Paul’s mandate in Ephesians 5. They are filled with His Spirit, “speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.”¹⁴⁶

Smith and Theologian Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen show how God meets His people in these practices. Smith talks about the importance of reading and preaching God’s Word. While the Bible reveals God’s truth, it is more than a manual of facts to memorize. The Holy Spirit meets God’s people as they consider the teachings of Scripture.¹⁴⁷ Smith calls the Bible “a site of divine action” and “conduit of the Spirit’s transformative power.”¹⁴⁸ Consequently, worshipers should expect to encounter God during the sermon. Smith’s words reveal the ultimate point of sermons in a worship service. While sermons should

¹⁴⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (Eugene: Wipf&Stock, 1953), 91.

¹⁴⁶ Eph 5:18-19.

¹⁴⁷ 2 Tim 3:16.

¹⁴⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 135.

bring encouragement and hope, and at times, entertain worshipers, the ultimate goal of preaching the Bible is to facilitate a divine encounter between God and His people.

Similarly, Nikolajsen shows how communion helps believers experience God's presence.¹⁴⁹ By taking the bread and cup, worshipers consider the sacrifice that Jesus paid on the cross to make forgiveness possible. Thus, communion helps people experience God around the communion table.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, Nikolajsen spells out the social implications of communion. He insists that the communion table unites worshipers together as the people of God.¹⁵¹ The communion table should bring unity, as believers complete this act together as the body of Christ. Preserving unity is a part of how followers of Jesus live out God's mission and witness to others in the world.¹⁵² All of these actions in a worship service help participants encounter God, which leads to spiritual growth.

Purpose #2: Grow as Disciples

Corporate worship should bring about greater discipleship within the Church. Smith calls the Christian faith "a form of life," and highlights how aspects of the worship gathering help participants grow as disciples.¹⁵³ According to Smith, the call to worship helps Christians remember their identity in Christ and their responsibility to follow Jesus

¹⁴⁹ When it comes to the doctrine of communion, many theological distinctives exist across different Christian traditions. The limited scope of this study prevents any serious treatment of these nuances. Still, this author maintains that Jesus meets worshipers around the communion table during a worship service.

¹⁵⁰ Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, "The Formative Power of Liturgy. The Church as a Liturgical Community in a Post-Christendom Society," *European Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (October 2014): 164.

¹⁵¹ Nikolajsen, "The Formative Power," 163.

¹⁵² John 17:20-21.

¹⁵³ Smith, *Desiring*, 134.

in every area of life. As believers come together in a service, they reflect on the God who chose, called, redeemed, forgave, and justified them. For Smith, this act helps them acknowledge their personal sin and shortcomings. Moreover, worshipers remember the sanctifying power of God's Spirit and look ahead with confidence to their ultimate glorification.¹⁵⁴

Smith talks about how God changes people's hearts in a worship gathering. First, he mentions the power of repetition and how habits inform daily life. For Smith, people learn from rituals, and these routines inform and shape their unconscious and conscious decisions.¹⁵⁵ When done regularly in a worship service, practices like prayer, confession, etc., become ongoing, second nature habits that inform a person's character, decisions, and actions in the world.¹⁵⁶

In addition, Smith argues that worship services change human behavior by tapping into and reframing people's deepest loves and desires. He insists that love and desire are the most fundamental parts of being human. Consequently, men and women will necessarily love certain objects and orient their lives around them.¹⁵⁷ Smith suggests that what people love ultimately governs how they live and informs their decisions and

¹⁵⁴ Smith, *Desiring*, 161.

¹⁵⁵ Smith, *Desiring*, 59.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, *Desiring*, 80.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, *Desiring*, 51.

actions.¹⁵⁸ He maintains that worship shapes the hearts of worshipers, forming their love for God.¹⁵⁹

Scholar of worship William Dyrness insists that this happens by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁰ As believers experience God in a worship service, the Holy Spirit changes them. Similarly, Smith insists that growing as disciples is only possible by the power of the God's Spirit who meets people in worship.¹⁶¹ He writes, "Worship is the arena in which we encounter God and are formed by God in and through the practices in which the Spirit is present."¹⁶² Nikolajsen highlights four primary parts of a worship service: gathering, sermon, sacrament, and sending.¹⁶³ All four parts contribute to spiritual formation.

The literature shows how specific parts of the worship service help participants grow as disciples. For example, the communion table compels worshipers to confront their sin and remember the reality of God's grace.¹⁶⁴ Preaching and the hearing of God's Word contributes to discipleship. Smith calls the Bible "the script of the worshipping community."¹⁶⁵ He explains that God uses Scripture to invite people into the redemptive

¹⁵⁸ Smith, *Desiring*, 53.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, *Imagining*, 152.

¹⁶⁰ William A. Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 48.

¹⁶¹ Smith, *Imagining*, 3.

¹⁶² Smith, *Imagining*, 152.

¹⁶³ Nikolajsen, "The Formative Power," 165.

¹⁶⁴ Nikolajsen, "The Formative Power," 164.

¹⁶⁵ Smith, *Desiring*, 195.

story of His people. The Bible reminds hearers of their place and role in God's mission, and as they read it, by His power, they enact it in the world.¹⁶⁶ Likewise, communion reminds believers of Jesus' sacrifice and the call to show a cross-shaped love to others.¹⁶⁷ Lastly, the benediction or sending leads to discipleship in the church and the spiritual growth of worshippers. As followers of God leave their places of worship, they remember that they are His body in the world.¹⁶⁸ Theologian Robert Martin-Achard explains that evangelism is about God's people carrying His presence with them into every area of life. Consequently, benedictions remind worshipers of God's mission and His call to serve others.¹⁶⁹

As worship transforms followers of Jesus, it, too, exposes the idols in their lives. Dean discusses one of these idols. She believes that the American church, has reduced the Christian faith into a religion of "self-fulfillment and self-actualization."¹⁷⁰ This mindset emphasizes the worshiper over and, at times, against God, the only true object of worship. According to Dean, this mistake can make people into their own personal idols. Worshipers start to worship themselves and care about their wants and desires more than God's truth. Dean explains, "American Christians tend to think with our stomachs, devouring whatever smells good in order to keep our inner rumblings at bay, oblivious to

¹⁶⁶ Smith, *Desiring*, 195.

¹⁶⁷ Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, "The Formative Power," 164.

¹⁶⁸ 1 Cor 12:12-27.

¹⁶⁹ Nikolajsen, "The Formative Power," 164.

¹⁷⁰ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 5.

our own misgivings.”¹⁷¹ She insists that worship is one of the antidotes to this idolatry. Ideally, the act of worship cultivates greater love for Jesus in the worshiper. Dean suggests, “It is in following Jesus that we learn to love him; it is in participating in the mission of God that God decisively changes us into disciples.”¹⁷² This language suggests that following Jesus and engaging in communal worship ought to foster deeper discipleship, ultimately culminating in a more profound commitment to God’s mission.

Similarly, Dyrness insists that worship services promote discipleship and make participants more like Jesus.¹⁷³ He explains that genuine worship should enable men and women to embody God’s love in the world.¹⁷⁴ Dyrness maintains that participating in a worship service helps the truth of the faith work itself into worshipers. This act should influence their emotions and reflexes, and consequently, impact their lives both in and outside of a worship gathering.¹⁷⁵ Dyrness suggests, “Worship, though grounded in something that God has done and continues to do in the world, reaches its goal in moving worshipers to be active participants in what God is doing.”¹⁷⁶ These words mean that worship repatterns the lives of believers.¹⁷⁷ The literature shows that a biblical understanding of worship helps the Church become the instrument through which God

¹⁷¹ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 8.

¹⁷² Dean, *Almost Christian*, 15.

¹⁷³ Dyrness, *A Primer*, 47.

¹⁷⁴ Dyrness, *A Primer*, 119.

¹⁷⁵ Dyrness, *A Primer*, 19.

¹⁷⁶ Dyrness, *A Primer*, 119.

¹⁷⁷ Guder et al., *Missional Church*, 105.

reveals His kingdom and purposes on earth.¹⁷⁸ This mission-minded lifestyle enables a “lived apologetic,” as Christians reflect the way of Jesus through both words and actions in their to-day-day lives.

Purpose #3: Enable a Lived Apologetic

The literature shows that participating in a worship service should enable worshipers to embody a “lived apologetic.” This paper will define “lived apologetic” as the commitment to share the way of Jesus with words and actions both within and beyond the local church. As such, the concept of a “lived apologetic” is a vital element of what the researcher will refer to as “all-level discipleship.”¹⁷⁹

Clayton Schmit, a scholar of worship, shows how specific parts of the worship gathering foster a lived apologetic. Schmit insists that corporate worship reminds believers that God remains present with them throughout the week. As participants hear, speak, and sing biblical truth, they, too, remember the reality of God’s love for them. Schmit suggests that in response to this love, worshipers must love others. The benediction, then, compels God’s people to participate in God’s mission of healing, peace, justice, and salvation outside the walls of the church building.¹⁸⁰

Worship scholar and missiologist Thomas H. Schattauer presents various ways that worship services help worshipers live out this missional calling. He highlights three primary approaches to worship and mission. First, Schattauer discusses the “inside and out” approach. This mindset assumes that worship occurs primarily within a church

¹⁷⁸ Guder et al., *Missional Church*, 100–101.

¹⁷⁹ For more information on all-level discipleship, see pages 115-122 below.

¹⁸⁰ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 52.

building and among a community of believers. Within this framework, followers of Jesus gather in worship with the primary aim of glorifying God. Mission, by contrast, is treated as a distinct activity carried out beyond the church walls, wherein believers proclaim the gospel and serve others. Corporate worship serves to nurture and sustain believers in their calling to share the gospel, yet it remains distinct from outreach and evangelism.¹⁸¹

Schattauer notes, “Worship and mission . . . remain distinct activities within clearly demarcated spheres on the church’s life.”¹⁸² By contrast, the “outside in” approach emphasizes mission as the primary purpose of the worship gathering.¹⁸³ In this mindset, the point of the worship service is to help believers complete their mission. Social issues and other outreach-oriented topics become the primary subject matter of the worship gathering.¹⁸⁴ Schattauer explains, “The church’s worship is reshaped to take up the tasks of the church’s mission, construed as evangelical outreach, social transformation, or both.”¹⁸⁵ Both approaches create a false dichotomy between worship and mission, positioning them in opposition rather than in partnership.

However, Schattauer’s third approach, “inside out,” joins worship and mission together as one calling for Christians. He explains, “This approach locates the liturgical assembly itself within the arena of the *missio Dei*. The focus is on God’s mission toward

¹⁸¹ Thomas H. Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly as Locus of Mission,” in *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission*, ed. Thomas H. Schattauer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 2.

¹⁸² Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly,” 2.

¹⁸³ Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly,” 3.

¹⁸⁴ Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly,” 2.

¹⁸⁵ Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly,” 3.

the world, to which the church witnesses and into which it is drawn.”¹⁸⁶ This mindset affirms that both corporate worship and Christian outreach are vital, complementary expressions of God’s mission. Worship is mission and mission is worship. The community of God experiences His mercy and grace in a worship service, enabling it to embody and extend that same mercy to the whole world.¹⁸⁷ Schattauer’s words connect corporate worship with a lived apologetic.

Other scholars make a similar point. Schmit explains that the actions of believers, their liturgical activity, along with their mission efforts, all fall within the category of worship.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, for Schmit, sermons convey God’s plan for the world, and the Holy Spirit transforms hearers to execute it.¹⁸⁹ Newbigin, too, insists that when worshipers experience God’s glory, God calls them to reflect it to creation, embodying His righteousness and justice in their day-to-day lives.¹⁹⁰

Worship theologian Mark Labberton connects worship with a lived apologetic. He asserts, “We should not fool ourselves into thinking that it’s enough to feel drawn to the heart of God without our lives showing the heart of God.”¹⁹¹ For Labberton, God uses worship to transform the hearts of his people, that they might hate and combat the

¹⁸⁶ Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly,” 3.

¹⁸⁷ Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly,” 3.

¹⁸⁸ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 44.

¹⁸⁹ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 44.

¹⁹⁰ Newbigin, *The Household*, 91.

¹⁹¹ Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God’s Call to Justice* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2007), 38.

brokenness in this world.¹⁹² Goheen and Mullins insist that followers of Jesus gather on Sunday to be scattered in their contexts, bearing witness to Jesus and His kingdom in all they do.¹⁹³

Likewise, worship scholar Bruce Ellis Benson connects the liturgy in a worship service with believers embodying a lived apologetic in the world. He insists that all acts are liturgical and as such, should be seen as offerings to God.¹⁹⁴ To support this point, Benson makes a distinction between intensive liturgy and extensive liturgy. Intensive liturgy is what happens inside of a worship service, as believers hear God's word, receive communion, and experience other elements of a corporate worship gathering. Extensive liturgy is when worshipers leave the church building to worship with their actions out in the world.¹⁹⁵ Benson's distinction connects the mission of God with all acts of worship, both inside and outside the walls of a church building.

Summary of Salvation and Worship in the Church

This section explored the relationship between the biblical concept of salvation and corporate worship. The literature affirms that salvation is comprehensive, encompassing all aspects of life. Those who have experienced salvation are invited into the Church to worship—both within and beyond the walls of a church building. In response, believers gather in worship to encounter God's presence, grow in discipleship,

¹⁹² Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 13.

¹⁹³ Goheen and Mullins, *The Symphony*, 27.

¹⁹⁴ Bruce Ellis Benson, *Liturgy As a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship*, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 24.

¹⁹⁵ Benson, *Liturgy As*, 128.

and embody a lived apologetic in the world. Thus, participating in worship services is an essential expression of how believers engage in God's mission.

Culture Shifts and their Influence on Worship

This section will focus on culture shifts that have impacted Christian worship.

While many shifts exist, this paper will focus on individualism, personal spirituality, and a consumer-driven worship culture.

Culture Shift #1: A Shift Toward an Individualistic Spirituality

Scholar Wolfhart Pannenberg traces individualism back to the Reformation.¹⁹⁶ He argues that the reformers emphasized a “protestant pietism” that focused on an individual's awareness of sin and personal guilt before God. Within this mindset, the solution, then, becomes grace and salvation for the individual.¹⁹⁷ Pannenberg contends that this individualistic orientation continues to influence the contemporary Church, as many congregants perceive themselves primarily as autonomous individuals rather than members of an integrated community.¹⁹⁸

This emphasis on individualism continued into American society. Philosopher Robert Bellah suggests, “Individualism lies at the very core of American culture.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ While Pannenberg is not alone in linking individualism with the Reformation, nonetheless, Zygmunt Bauman, a sociologist-philosopher, reminds us that individualism's lineage and development are more complicated than Pannenberg implies. For more information, see Hanz Gutierrez, “Protestantism And Contemporary Individualism—Dialoguing with Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017),” *Spectrum Magazine*, June 8, 2017, <https://spectrummagazine.org/views/protestantism-and-contemporary-individualism-dialoguing-zygmunt-bauman-1925-2017/>.

¹⁹⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 17.

¹⁹⁸ Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality*, 31–32.

¹⁹⁹ Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985), 142.

Bellah demonstrates how individualism has shaped both the American church and the broader culture in which it exists. Notably, individualism redefined the concept of human freedom. While many of the United States' founders originally understood freedom not as the license to do whatever one pleases, but as the capacity to live responsibly within a community for the common good, eventually, this understanding shifted. Christian leaders such as John Winthrop expanded on this vision, articulating freedom as a moral freedom—the ability to live in covenant relationship with God while working to establish a “good, just, and honest” society.²⁰⁰ By contrast, other American leaders defined freedom in more personal and individualistic ways. Bellah cites Benjamin Franklin as an example, noting, “Franklin gave classic expression to what many felt in the eighteenth century—and many have felt ever since—to be the most important thing about America: the chance for the individual to get ahead on his own initiative.”²⁰¹ Such thought led to people prioritizing individual self-improvement over the needs of the community.²⁰²

Bellah explains that as cultural values shifted, freedom came to mean the ability to “express oneself against all constraints and conventions.”²⁰³ As the United States entered the twentieth-century, there was an increasing emphasis on individual needs, often at the expense of communal responsibility.²⁰⁴ People began to compartmentalize their lives, distinguishing between the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of

²⁰⁰ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 29.

²⁰¹ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 33.

²⁰² Bellah et al., *Habits*, 33.

²⁰³ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 34.

²⁰⁴ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 37.

the workplace.²⁰⁵ Religion became confined to the private sphere, which in turn made church worship services more individualistic in nature.²⁰⁶ This fact proves especially true in some Protestant traditions, as believers emphasize their individual rights.²⁰⁷ Historian Michael Horton argues that this mindset caused believers to make God their personal civil servant, primarily considered with their personal interests.²⁰⁸ Bellah summarizes this shift, explaining, “Religion did not cease to be concerned with the moral order, but it operated with a new emphasis on the individual and a voluntary association.”²⁰⁹ Bellah argues that corporate worship shifted from being about honoring God to focusing on pleasing the individual, rather than participating in God’s mission.²¹⁰

Second, individualism influences Christian discipleship. Bellah contends that worship became increasingly self-centered, tracing this shift to a key eighteenth-century ideology: utilitarian, expressive individualism. Bellah defines this value as “the chance for the individual to get ahead on his own initiative.”²¹¹ Popular sayings arose from this mindset, like “God helps those who help themselves.”²¹² Bellah explains, “By the end of the eighteenth century, there would be those who would argue that a society where each

²⁰⁵ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 43.

²⁰⁶ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 43.

²⁰⁷ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 64.

²⁰⁸ Michael Scott Horton, *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 64.

²⁰⁹ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 222.

²¹⁰ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 244.

²¹¹ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 33.

²¹² Bellah et al., *Habits*, 32.

vigorously pursued his own interest, the social good would automatically emerge.”²¹³

Individuals began to prioritize their own needs over those of others, amassing wealth and material resources. Moreover, they felt a diminished sense of responsibility toward caring for the less fortunate.²¹⁴ Independence and self-reliance were valued over helping and serving a community.²¹⁵ Bellah explains, “It is precisely because self-made individuals don’t appreciate their need for God that they don’t appreciate their need for other people.”²¹⁶ With this mindset, discipleship became more about individual spiritual growth with less of an emphasis on serving others.

Third, individualism shapes the understanding of worship. Labberton suggests, “The stark track record of the contemporary American church, however, seems to be that the plight of the poor and suffering have only a tertiary connection at best with our pursuit of worship.”²¹⁷ These words imply that believers often prioritize their own needs during worship services, sidelining the broader call of God’s mission. Dean highlights the negative impact that this mindset has on corporate worship. She argues that American churches “have perfected a dicey codependence between consumer-driven therapeutic individualism and religious pragmatism.”²¹⁸ Her statement shows the tension between

²¹³ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 33.

²¹⁴ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 37. Readers should note that the ideology of individualism and human selfishness at others expense did not start in the 18th century. Still, Bellah and others show that significant thinkers like Benjamin Franklin, Walt Whitman, and Alex de Tocqueville emphasized them and infused them into the collective cultural mindset of Americans. For more details, see Bellah et al., *Habits*, 31-37.

²¹⁵ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 57.

²¹⁶ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 156.

²¹⁷ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 39.

²¹⁸ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 5.

addressing individual needs in worship services and using these gatherings to call and equip God's people for service. Similarly, Sociologist James Davison Hunter offers another way that individualism impacted corporate worship. He notes the evangelical church's emphasis on the individual moment of salvation.²¹⁹ Hunter cites evangelical and Baptist denominations to make his point. He insists that both of those groups define the gospel as a voluntary and personal decision to follow Jesus.²²⁰ At times, this assumption elevates the needs of the individual as the primary focus of the worship service. Such a limited understanding of the gospel affects the Church, potentially positioning the individual worshiper as the central focus of corporate worship.

Culture Shift #2: A Shift Toward a Personal Spirituality

Personal spirituality also impacts Christian worship, and several scholars make this point. First, Dyrness notes several developments that brought about an emphasis on private spirituality in the Church. He cites the Reformation's shift toward an internal focus in worship and an "inward aspect of faith."²²¹ Dyrness argues that the Puritans picked up on this theme in the seventeenth century, emphasizing personal reflection over corporate participation.²²² The worship service at that time stressed listening to sermons

²¹⁹ James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1983), 7.

²²⁰ Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 7 and 24.

²²¹ Dyrness, *A Primer*, 44–46.

²²² To be fair, while Puritanism did emphasize the importance of personal devotion and individual spiritual exercises, etc., many Puritan communities also practiced corporate and societal dimensions of the Christian faith. For more information, see Angela Skeggs, "Community: The Thread that Holds Individuals Together," *Constructing the Past* Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 8 (2002): 66-69, <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1056&context=constructing#:~:text=%22%20Though%20people%20should%20have%20the,the%20welfare%20of%20the%20community>.

and pastoral prayers.²²³ Moreover, Dyrness cites the Enlightenment as a contributing factor. He explains that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, thinkers reduced theology to an “intellectual map” on which to locate God.²²⁴ They highlighted a person’s individual ability to grasp God in an inward, cerebral, and personal way.²²⁵ Dyrness asserts, “The notions of personal faith and voluntary commitment were destined to become the normative form of Christian community, especially in the New World.”²²⁶

Second, drawing on the thoughts of Newbigin, Goheen makes a similar point, insisting that because of the Enlightenment, society placed religion into the realm of values. It made faith a personal matter that did not affect all of humanity in a universal way. The literature indicates that this led to a compartmentalized understanding of the faith, where the church was perceived merely as a building attended on Sundays, rather than the all-encompassing missional vocation portrayed in the New Testament.²²⁷ Within this framework, salvation became private, and Christian mission was reduced to a cross-cultural activity for some, but not all believers.²²⁸

Lastly, Bellah demonstrates how the emphasis on personal faith persisted into the twentieth century. As individuals increasingly rejected external authority, they grew resistant to environments in which conflicting values or lifestyles were imposed upon

²²³ Dyrness, *A Primer*, 54.

²²⁴ William A. Dyrness, *The Earth Is God’s: A Theology of American Culture* (Eugene: Wipf&Stock, 2004), 4.

²²⁵ Dyrness, *The Earth*, 4.

²²⁶ Dyrness, *A Primer*, 57.

²²⁷ Goheen, *The Church*, 30.

²²⁸ Smith, *Imagining*, 2–3.

them. This mindset led them to oppose any belief systems perceived as infringing upon their personal freedom.²²⁹ Along with that, “the individual self” emerged as the primary source of meaning and purpose in the universe.²³⁰ This shift elevated self-reliance and independence, often at the expense of communal cooperation and service to others.²³¹ Consequently, the task of shaping one’s worldview became a private and individual responsibility.

As a personal spirituality rose within western thought, it impacted the Church in several ways. First, the research shows how private spirituality affected worship. Bellah notes how personal human choice, autonomy, and self-acceptance were emphasized over submission to God’s authority over life.²³² He continues, arguing that Christian worship became about “subjective goodness of getting what you want and enjoying it . . . ‘being good’ becomes ‘feeling good.’”²³³ For Bellah, this personal spirituality made worship less about God and God’s mission and more about discovering one’s self and finding fulfillment in life.²³⁴ In addition, sermons emphasized God’s love over His commands, emphasizing emotions and sentiments over Christian doctrine.²³⁵

Second, the rise of personal spirituality reshaped the relationship between church leadership and individual worshipers. Pastors and church staff increasingly prioritized the

²²⁹ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 23.

²³⁰ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 34.

²³¹ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 55–57.

²³² Bellah et al., *Habits*, 63.

²³³ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 77.

²³⁴ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 82 and 163.

²³⁵ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 223.

personal needs of congregants, allowing these concerns to shape their ministry.²³⁶ As a result, the authority of church leadership diminished, along with its capacity to challenge and exhort the congregation.²³⁷ Historian and sociologist Claude Fischer shows how this development affected participation in the local church. “Churches,” he notes, “served primarily as pulpits for the dissemination of ideas to an audience of otherwise unconnected individuals.”²³⁸ These private and internal assumptions about worship contribute to what Guder calls an “arcane activity of religionists who retreat from the world to practice their mystical rites.”²³⁹

Third, personal spirituality affected the ways doctrine informed worship gatherings. Congregants increasingly began to view spirituality in subjective, non-doctrinal terms. Merrill M. Hawkins, a scholar of religion, argues that in the twenty-first century, religious individuals began to develop a reflexive spirituality—“a situation of mixing and borrowing from many different, even contradictory traditions, and cobbling them together to create something that serves an individual.”²⁴⁰ This means that worshipers can choose what they believe, regardless of logical consistency, often selecting beliefs based on what they perceive to be the most helpful or personally

²³⁶ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1988), 55.

²³⁷ Claude S. Fischer, *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010), 152.

²³⁸ Fischer, *Made in America*, 56.

²³⁹ Guder et al., *Missional Church*, 243.

²⁴⁰ Merrill M. Hawkins, Jr., “Personal Spirituality,” in *Faith in America: Changes, Challenges, New Directions*, ed. Charles H Lippy, vol. 3 (Westport: Praeger, 2006), 49.

meaningful.²⁴¹ For Hawkins, this pragmatic approach to faith made church life more “tentative, personal, and autonomous.”²⁴² Bellah explains how this shift toward a private spirituality impacted the purpose of worship services. Sermons began to emphasize the love of God more, while downplaying the importance of obedience to His commands.²⁴³ For Labberton, this shift allows followers of Jesus to separate worship from God’s call to love and serve their neighbors. Rather than viewing worship as a vital part of missional living, worshipers increasingly saw the church service as a personal way to connect with God, disconnected from any activity outside the church walls.²⁴⁴

Lastly, personal spirituality impacted Christian discipleship. Followers of Jesus began to see discipleship as an individual endeavor. It became the responsibility of each person to grow spiritually, and spiritual formation was viewed as a solo journey.²⁴⁵ Kinnaman and Matlock highlight this shift, noting “There has been a shift in American Christianity toward the notion that discipleship is a solo effort . . . This thread echoes the cultural refrains of the moment: You do you. Find yourself by looking within. Speak your truth.”²⁴⁶ This assumption transforms discipleship into a personal activity, potentially diminishing the focus on God’s mission in the world.

Culture Shift #3: A Shift Toward a Consumer-driven Spirituality

²⁴¹ Hawkins, Jr., “Personal Spirituality,” 48.

²⁴² Hawkins, Jr., “Personal Spirituality,” 51.

²⁴³ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 223.

²⁴⁴ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 22.

²⁴⁵ David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 50.

²⁴⁶ Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 50.

Similarly, consumerism has influenced the American church and individuals' participation in worship services. Church historians Bruce Shelly and Marshall Shelly illustrate this shift, suggesting that in the post-WWII era, baby boomers replaced the ethic of self-denial with that of self-fulfillment.²⁴⁷ They explain how this emphasis on self-fulfillment led to the rise of the call to "be yourself." Individual happiness became life's primary goal, and people began to assume that happiness required the freedom to express oneself, convey personal feelings, and consume experiences.²⁴⁸ In the 1960's, fueled by economic growth, Americans began to see themselves more as consumers than producers.²⁴⁹ As a result, worship services became another commodity to be marketed and consumed, with participants seeking to satisfy their personal needs.²⁵⁰

The literature illustrates how this reality impacts worship gatherings. For Dean, it encourages Christians to replace biblical Christianity with moral therapeutic deism (MTD). MTD acknowledges the existence of a god who watches over the world, with the primary purpose of ensuring that people are good, nice, and fair. When MTD infiltrates the Christian worldview, happiness becomes the central goal for Christians, who attend worship gatherings in search of personal fulfillment.²⁵¹ Labberton argues that this mindset lead to worship services that offered comfort but never challenged the

²⁴⁷ Bruce Shelly and Marshall Shelly, *Consumer Church: Can Evangelicals Win the World Without Losing Their Souls?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 31.

²⁴⁸ Shelly and Shelly, *Consumer Church*, 124.

²⁴⁹ Hawkins, Jr., "Personal Spirituality," 50.

²⁵⁰ Shelly and Shelly, *Consumer Church*, 130.

²⁵¹ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14. See page 14 of this work for a fuller treatment on moral therapeutic deism.

worshiper.²⁵² Consequently, congregants prioritized churches and worship services that felt familiar and met their assumed needs.²⁵³ For Labberton, this reality eliminates the necessity of mission for followers of Jesus. He writes, “Our worship practices are separated from our call to justice and, worse, foster self-indulgent tendencies of our culture rather than nurturing the self-sacrificing life of the kingdom of God.”²⁵⁴ This approach to church contradicts the ideal for worship outlined in Scripture.

Smith, too, presents the negative effects that this shift toward consumerism has on worship in the church. For Smith, consumerism makes obtaining wealth and possessions the primary goal of life.²⁵⁵ It reduces Christianity to a collection of beliefs that followers of Jesus embrace for their own benefit. Smith writes, “Modern Christianity tends to think of the church either as a place where individuals come to find answers to their questions or as one more stop where individuals can try to satisfy their consumeristic desires.”²⁵⁶ This mindset can negatively affect a person’s participation in a local church congregation. Labberton cautions that it can foster a self-absorbed, me-centered theology, reducing God to a “personal shopper” rather than the King of the universe.²⁵⁷

Bellah discusses how this “personal shopper” view of God impacts the Church. He notes, “There is even a tendency visible in many evangelical circles to thin the

²⁵² Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 46.

²⁵³ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 56–58.

²⁵⁴ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 22.

²⁵⁵ James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, *The Church and Postmodern Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 104.

²⁵⁶ Smith, *Who’s Afraid*, 29.

²⁵⁷ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 80.

biblical language of sin and redemption to an idea of Jesus as friend who helps us find happiness and self-fulfillment.”²⁵⁸ As a result of these beliefs, congregants perceive the church—particularly worship—as something designed to serve their personal needs. This limited understanding of worship leads them to leave their churches over the slightest grievances. These tendencies reinforce the assumption that, in consumer-centric spirituality, the Church exists primarily to fulfill individual needs.

Moreover, the literature shows how consumerism affected Christians’ reasons for following Jesus. For example, Hawkins suggests that a worshiper’s main question in a service went from “How can I be saved?” to “How can I feel good about myself?”²⁵⁹ Labberton acknowledges this trend, noting that it can “shroud the gospel in such middle and upper-class consumer-oriented style and content that salvation subtly becomes more about providing a warm blanket of cultural safety than about stepping out into the bracing winds of spiritual sacrifice.”²⁶⁰ In this consumer-driven spirituality, a missional, lived-apologetic may become a secondary concern.

Statistics from the Barna Research Group confirm that consumer-driven spirituality exists in the life of the American church. 53% of American Christians consider enjoyment and personal fulfillment as the main purpose of life.²⁶¹ This statistic suggests that congregations are inward-focused, neglecting the missional activity commanded by God and assumed by the biblical authors. In addition, Barna shows that

²⁵⁸ Bellah et al., *Habits*, 232.

²⁵⁹ Hawkins, Jr., “Personal Spirituality,” 53.

²⁶⁰ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 16.

²⁶¹ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2001), 79.

42% of American Christians cannot articulate the meaning or purpose of worship, and less than one-quarter of all born-again adults consciously strive to make worship a regular part of their lives. These numbers suggest that participation in a church service has become less of a priority for followers of Jesus. When asked about their most important goals or achievements in life, less than 1% of Christians mentioned worshipping God.²⁶²

From this research, Barna concludes:

Believers have been incredibly blessed by God with material possessions, but we are loath to return the favor and invest in his priorities. We serve others when we must, but few believers have a love of serving people; our culture has seduced us into living to be served instead of committing ourselves to meeting the needs of others.²⁶³

Barna's research shows that consumerism disrupts the Church's ability to live out God's mission in the world.

Summary of Culture Shifts and their Influence on Worship

Over time, various culture shifts have shaped worship in the American church. This paper examined individualistic spirituality, personal spirituality, and consumer-driven spirituality. The Reformation, the Enlightenment, American ideologies, and other influences have contributed to these shifts. These cultural changes affect how Christians approach and engage in worship gatherings. Furthermore, they hinder believers from embodying a lived apologetic and fully participating in God's mission in the world.

²⁶² Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 59.

²⁶³ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 83.

Summary of Literature Review

This literature review explored the connection between corporate worship and the mission of God. It first outlined a biblical missiology, examining Genesis 1 and 2, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, and Romans 12:1-2. Next, it discussed three key areas of literature: a biblical understanding of salvation, the relationship between salvation and worship, and three cultural shifts that have shaped believers' assumptions about and participation in worship services. Salvation is holistic and comprehensive, as God works to redeem humanity and restore creation. Worship services are a part of this redemptive work, offering believers the opportunity to experience God's presence, grow as disciples, and embody a lived apologetic in the world. While excessive individualism, personal spirituality, and consumerism obscure the true purpose of worship, the Church must remain faithful to the call to embody God's mission in every area of life.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate the connection between corporate worship services and Christian mission. It sought to explore how pastors use worship gatherings to disciple their congregants and help them embody the mission of God in every area of life. This study assumed that pastors have noticed a connection between the way they design worship services inside the church walls and how those services inform community engagement outside of the walls of the church. In other words, it took for granted that serving outside of the church building can indicate the legitimacy and effectiveness of worship during a church service. To address this purpose, the research identified four main areas of focus. First, it outlined a biblical missiology given in Genesis 1 and 2, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, and Romans 12:1-2. Second, it looked at a biblical understanding of salvation and how that understanding influences Christian worship. Lastly, it considered the impact of three culture shifts that have affected the Church and corporate worship. To examine these areas more closely, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. In what ways do pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in public life?
2. How do pastors describe the connection between worship practices and embodying the mission of God in every area of life?
3. What church worship service outcomes do pastors observe in congregants?
4. What church worship service outcomes do pastors desire to observe in congregants?

Design of the Study

This paper used a basic qualitative study to answer the research questions. It limited its participants to six pastors that regularly create worship services. This careful selection helped the study achieve its intended goals. Professor Sharan B. Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, discusses the importance of qualitative research. The method helps researchers describe phenomena in the world today. Merriam writes, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”²⁶⁴ The method assumes that the development of knowledge is an ongoing process, as people make meaning of their activities and experiences.²⁶⁵ At all times, researchers work as investigators.²⁶⁶ They see the participant as the primary means of knowing and gathering data.

This type of careful investigation helps the researcher draw conclusions between regular participation in a worship gathering and engaging the world on mission outside the walls of a church building. Summarizing the nature of qualitative research, Merriam notes that the researcher’s primary focus “is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive.”²⁶⁷ This aspect of qualitative research helps the researcher formulate conclusions. First, it narrows the scope of the project and

²⁶⁴ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, Fourth (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 15.

²⁶⁵ Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 23.

²⁶⁶ Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 31.

²⁶⁷ Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 15.

allows the primary researcher to focus on the details in relevant ways. As an outside observer, the researcher can look for any patterns that help answer the research questions. Lastly, the descriptive data, too, serves this process, giving the researcher ample details to form conclusions.

This study employed a qualitative research method with semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. This fieldwork involved meeting with other pastors, listening to their insights, and asking relevant questions. While the semi-structured interviews included a previously formulated plan, they had enough flexibility to follow the train of thought in the conversation.

Participant Sample Selection

This research required participants who can communicate in depth about designing church worship services, discipleship outcomes, and Christian mission in the lives of their congregants. Each of the six pastors chosen in the sample selection has experience creating worship services for participants in their local churches. They also have a passion their congregants actively living out God's mission in the world. The selected pastors and their churches provide numerous opportunities for congregants to serve their communities. Moreover, they have a vested interest in creating participatory worship gatherings that will result in furthering the missional impact of their respective churches in the world.

Participants were purposefully chosen to represent a variety of worship styles. They also varied in age, denomination, and church context, which ensures a wide spectrum of diversity for the study. The interview subjects were invited to participate via an introductory email, followed by a personal phone call. All the pastors expressed

interest in being involved and gave written informed consent to participate. Their names were changed during the transcription process to protect their identities and privacy.

Before conducting the interviews, each subject received a participant consent form. The form made them aware that the data would be published in this dissertation but also informed them that their names and any names used in examples would be changed to protect the privacy of all parties involved. The consent form is as follows:

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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

The following points have been explained to me:

- 1) The purpose of the research is to investigate how pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in every area of life. It considers the connection between regular attendance in worship gatherings and Christian mission.
- 2) Potential benefits of the research may include helping regular church attenders be more mission minded. It also provides a helpful metric of discipleship and assumes that if Christians grow in their relationships with Jesus, then they will take his call to love and serve seriously. Lastly, it serves an evangelistic purpose, showing other-than-Christians why the church and its message is relevant in society. Though there are no direct benefits for participants, I hope they will be encouraged by processing and sharing their experiences and related expertise.
- 3) The research process will include six pastors that each agree to one ninety-minute interview. The interviews will be record and then transcribed, changing names and any details that give away the identity of the participant. The research also involved studying biblical missiology and trends within the American church in the 20th and 21st centuries.
- 4) Participants in this research will agree to sit for a roughly ninety-minute interview. While the questions will be selected, the conversation will be loose and

open-ended, allowing the participant to follow trains of thought. The researcher will build on these ideas during the conversation.

5) Potential discomforts or stresses: while no discomfort or stress is intended, participants will need to commit to a roughly ninety-minute time frame. Moreover, the questions asked may bring up negative past experiences. Participants can choose what details to include and when to pivot to a different question.

6) Potential risks: Minimal. The interview will ask about personal information, including individual opinions, viewpoints, experiences, attitudes and beliefs. The questions may be emotionally, spiritually, or psychologically sensitive. While not intentional, the participants may have after thoughts or unintended negative reactions to the interview. Lastly, the research may inconvenience the participants and intrude on their typical daily activities and routines.

7) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.

8) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.

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

Printed Name and Signature of Researcher Date

Printed Name and Signature of Participant Date

Following IRB requirements, this study was not federally funded, supported, or endorsed by any government agency. The research scope was limited to non-vulnerable adult human subjects that agreed to the interview process. Due to the changing of names

and personal information, confidentiality was ensured, protecting the identities of the participants. These steps made sure that the subjects were not at risk of criminal or civil liability that would damage their financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation. Based on the Seminary IRB guidelines, the Human Rights Risk Level Assessment is one of “minimal risk.”

Data Collection

This study utilized six semi-structured ninety-minute interviews for primary data gathering. Each interview was recorded using the Apple Voice Memos application, the Zoom recording function, and then transcribed. The researcher listened to each interview and corrected any minimal mistakes to ensure accuracy. This method allowed the participants to use their own language and “to define the world in unique ways.”²⁶⁸ Due to the open-ended aspect of the interviews, the researcher could build upon the details and ask related questions in real time.²⁶⁹ Ultimately, these methods enabled this study to notice patterns or regular themes within the data sample, while also contrasting the data across interviews with multiple subjects.

The researcher performed a pilot test of the interview protocol to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature but evolved around the explanations and descriptions that emerged in the interviews. This resulted from the constant comparison work during the interview process. Coding and categorizing the data while continuing the

²⁶⁸ Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 74.

²⁶⁹ Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 75.

process of interviewing also allowed for the emergence of new sources of data. The following list contains the interview protocol:

1. What is your philosophy of worship?
2. What is your theology of the mission of God?
3. What are your goals for the worship service?
4. What outcomes do you see from your worship services?
5. In what ways do you see your congregants live out the mission of God in their public lives?
6. In what ways do you design your worship services to help your congregants live missionally in the world?
7. In what ways are your church members currently participating in mission within your local community?
8. Where do you think you have room to grow when it comes to the relationship between the worship service and the mission of God?
9. What trends or culture shifts do you see in the world that impact Christian worship and mission?

Data Analysis

The researcher interviewed six pastors, and each interview lasted for roughly ninety minutes. Prior to the interview, the participants were given a sense of the topic. To stay present during the interview, the researcher recorded each conversation, which was transcribed later. During and directly after each interview, the researcher wrote field

notes with descriptive and reflective observations on the interview. This allowed him to notice patterns that emerged throughout the data collection.

When the interview and observation notes were fully transcribed, they were coded and analyzed using the constant comparative method. Merriam describes the constant comparative method in this way:

The constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data.²⁷⁰

This method allowed the researcher to look at all the interview data, make comparisons, and notice regularities.²⁷¹ The analysis focused on discovering and identifying (1) common themes, patterns, and trends across the variation of participants; and (2) differences that arose between the subjects, taking special note of the different church contexts, locations, and worship styles.

Researcher Position

As mentioned above, in a qualitative study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing the data. While this approach has its benefits, it also brings its own limitations. As Merriam notes, “All investigations are informed by some discipline-specific theoretical framework.”²⁷² This framework may result in bias, and the assumptions carried into the research are listed below.

²⁷⁰ Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 32.

²⁷¹ Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 203.

²⁷² Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 17.

First, the researcher assumes that regularly participating in corporate worship is an essential part of spiritual formation and discipleship. Not every pastor may agree with that statement or may have different motivations when designing his or her services. Some pastors may see their weekly gatherings as entry points for new believers and seekers, gearing their services toward reaching them and not discipling mature believers. The researcher's opinions will necessarily influence the questions that he asked during the interview process.

Second, the researcher comes from a contemporary, evangelical church context, which may influence his assumptions about worship. His context involves contemporary instruments, modern architecture, the use of technology throughout the worship service, and a low-church liturgy. This may impact his analysis of different church contexts.

Third, the researcher limited the study's scope to the American church, so the findings may not be relevant to church contexts in other countries. While there is some overlap, the issues of the American church are different from churches in other parts of the world.

Lastly, the interview participants may want to portray their congregations in a positive way. Whether done intentionally or unintentionally, this desire may influence how they shared or emitted certain details. Ultimately, while acknowledging these limitations, the researcher longs to see the American church pursue its missional calling in the 21st century. As society moves more toward a post-Christian context, taking this call seriously will help churches reach new people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Study Limitations

As stated in the previous section, participants interviewed for this study were limited to pastors who plan worship gatherings. Therefore, not every staff person at a church was interviewed. Some of the study's findings may be generalized or universalized onto different church contexts. As with all qualitative studies, readers should actively test the findings against their ministry contexts. The results of this study may also have implications for Christian nonprofit organizations and parachurch organizations not affiliated with a particular worshipping community.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in every area of life. This chapter provides the findings from six interviews with pastors that were based on the research questions. It presents relevant themes and ideas pertinent to the research scope of the study. The following questions guided the qualitative research.

1. In what ways do pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in public life?
2. How do pastors describe the connection between worship practices and embodying the mission of God in every area of life?
3. What church worship service outcomes do pastors observe in congregants?
4. What church worship service outcomes do pastors desire to observe in congregants?

Introductions to Participants and Context

The researcher selected six pastors to participate in this study. Each of the interview subjects is involved in discipleship within their church contexts, including their church's outreach efforts, the planning and implementation of worship services, or a combination of all three. The subjects come from a variety of churches in different denominations. Their church contexts also vary in size and demographic. All names and identifiable participant information have been changed to protect the identities of the research subjects.

Participant #1 – Nancy

“Nancy” is an Associate Pastor of a nondenominational multisite church in the northeast. Her church has three locations and averages 500 attenders per weekend across all sites. From a demographic standpoint, Nancy describes her church as upper-class, elderly, and predominantly white. Her role at the church involves preaching about half of the Sundays each year and leading the liturgical elements of the service. She also oversees the church’s outreach and mission efforts. Nancy was baptized Episcopalian and grew up within the Pentecostal and prosperity gospel movements. This background gives her a wide range of diverse corporate worship styles. She cares deeply about the worship gathering and how it helps believers serve their neighbors outside of the church walls.

Participant #2 – Bob

“Bob” is a pastor at a multisite church in the Midwest. The church has approximately 6,000 attenders across multiple locations each weekend. While predominately white, it is diverse across age and socio-economic demographics. His role involves preaching roughly thirty percent of the weekends each year, training new teachers, and assisting with discipleship classes at the church. From a weekend service perspective, Bob works with the music and production teams that help craft and execute the weekend worship gatherings. He also plans additional nights of worship and prayer for the congregation and helped launch one of the church’s primary outreach initiatives. Bob comes from a Methodist church background, so he has experience in different church contexts with varying worship styles. He is passionate about reaching all types of people with the gospel of Jesus and sees the worship service as one of the best ways to

share the truths of Scripture. He has a passion for helping his congregants serve their local community.

Participant #3 – Gemma

“Gemma” serves a multisite, nondenominational church in the southeastern part of the United States. When she came on staff, it was predominately white but has become more diverse over the past few years. Around 3,600 attenders participate on the weekend. Gemma is an Executive Producer and a Worship Pastor. These roles mean that she helps lead the teams that craft the weekend worship services. Gemma also leads one of the sites in worship each weekend. She comes from a Pentecostal background that had a more charismatic worship style. Gemma is passionate about worship as a means of spiritual formation and discipleship.

Participant #4 – Michael

“Michael” is a pastor at a nondenominational church in the southwestern United States with roots in the Assemblies of God movement. His church has roughly 500 attenders each weekend with a demographic that is predominately white, elderly, and middle class. Michael oversees the church’s worship ministry and serves on the executive and teaching teams. He comes from an Assemblies of God background and sees the worship gathering as a means of discipleship and spiritual formation.

Participant #5 – Luke

“Luke” is a pastor and spiritual coordinator of a Missouri Synod Lutheran church located in the Midwest. The church has about 2,100 members and averages 700 participants each weekend. From a demographic standpoint, the church is predominately white and mostly made up of families with parents between the ages of thirty and fifty

years old. Luke oversees spiritual direction and participates in the worship services. During his ministry career, he has served in both Episcopalian and Lutheran contexts. As an Episcopal Priest, Luke was heavily involved in putting together the liturgy for the worship service each weekend. Luke cares deeply about what God is accomplishing through the Church in the world in both local and global contexts.

Participant #6 – Gary

Gary is a solo Lead Pastor at a Presbyterian church in the Midwest. His church averages 300 attenders per weekend. From a demographic standpoint, it is diverse when it comes to age and education levels. The congregation is made up of Caucasians, Eastern Europeans immigrants, and Hispanics. As a solo pastor, Gary preaches each weekend, plans the order of service, and oversees every aspect of the worship gathering. He grew up in the Presbyterian church and previously worked as a worship leader. Gary cares deeply about the power of worship as means to encounter God, glorify Him, and participate in His mission in the world.

Worship Services and the Mission of God

The first research question sought to determine “In what ways do pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in public life?” Each participant articulated their personal philosophies of worship. These beliefs inform how the subjects structure their worship gatherings, choose the necessary parts of their worship services, and reveal their underlying values.

Philosophy of Worship

The subjects conveyed their own philosophies of worship. At its most basic level, worship has an object of worship (i.e., God) and a response (i.e., what God calls the worshiper to do).

The Object of Worship

Bob, Nancy, Gemma, and Luke defined worship as an act toward a primary object. Bob described worship as “anything that a human being does as an act of devotion towards an entity that they want to ascribe worth.” He noted that this act reveals a person’s ultimate allegiance. Nancy made a similar point. She defined worship as “giving worth to what is worthy of value.” Gemma described the primary goal of her context’s worship gatherings as “lead[ing] people to the throne [of God].” Worship services are an essential way that her congregation encounters God. Luke touched on the One who sits on that throne, noting, that we “gather as the people of God to encounter the living God and worship [him].” All the interview subjects tied the act of worship to an object of worship. As Christian pastors, that object is the one Triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

When discussing the object of worship, Gary emphasized Jesus. He hopes that every aspect of his worship service is Christ-centered. “We don’t want to do anything that distracts from Christ,” he explained. Gary showed how specific elements in his services keep God as the focal point of worship. He described the call to worship as an “undeserving invitation from God.” God invites men and women to encounter Him in an intimate, personal way. The benediction, too, is an undeserved blessing for the participants. For Gary, when worshipers leave the church building, ideally, they

remember the encounter they had with God and the resulting hope, peace, grace, joy, etc., because of it. The benediction helps him achieve this goal.

Michael described the relational aspect of worship. He explained that God made all people to glorify him and have a relationship with him. Worship is a necessary part of that relationship. Michael's words speak to the relational dynamic between God and His people, suggesting that this relationship necessitates a response from the worshipper.

A Response

The necessity of a response on behalf of the worshiper was an important theme in each of the interviews. As the subjects talked about responses in worship, three common themes came to the surface: 1) they described worship as a back-and-forth encounter between the worshiper and God, 2) they described worship as an all-encompassing lifestyle, and 3) they described worship as a transformational experience.

A Back-and-Forth Encounter

Gary described worship as a back-and-forth conversation, explaining, "God speaks to us, and we speak to Him in worship. Worship is not a one-way communication but a dialogue between God and His people." This conversation happens at both an individual and communal level, and Gary and Bob called out the personal and corporate aspects of this encounter. Gary explained, "[Worship] is a collective calling," but he, too, acknowledged that people are to follow Jesus personally in their day-to-day lives. Gary stated that followers of Jesus worship corporately, so that they can worship privately throughout the week. Bob, too, made this point, saying, "All of what we do together as a [church] body is, in essence, also a place where we get to practice things that I think we're encouraging people to carry out in the rest of their daily lives." Gary used a sports

analogy to drive this point home, noting the differences between cheering on your team alone and in the stadium. He explained, “[The worship service] is a bunch of individuals coming together to do publicly what they were doing privately. And we’re all rooting for the same team at home in front of our TV, but now, we’re going to root for the team in the stadium.” Gary’s words shed light on the importance of corporate gatherings. He insisted that there is something unique about God’s people coming together for worship. For Gary, in those moments, the Holy Spirit dwells with His people in a unique way, like God’s presence dwelling in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple. Worshippers encounter God’s presence, and this should impact their lives outside of the worship service.

An All-encompassing Lifestyle

Most of the interview subjects described worship as an all-encompassing lifestyle that happens both inside and outside of a worship gathering. Gemma explained, “It’s more than song-singing.” Nancy had a similar thought, noting, “It’s certainly more than music . . . it’s acknowledging in anything that we do that God is the King of kings.” Michael made the same point, suggesting, “Everything is worship. All of life is worship.” Bob put it this way: “I think it’s beyond just what happens when a church gathers together on a Sunday morning, or whatever it is. Worship is loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” He mentioned Paul’s analogy in Romans 12:1. Bob explained, “If I’m a living sacrifice . . . if I sacrificed myself on the altar of God, but I’m still living, that means everything that I can do with my life can be offered up as a kind of worship to God. And there’s just almost no limit to it. It is all-encompassing.”

When it comes to this all-encompassing lifestyle of worship, Nancy mentioned the importance of intentionality. She explained, “I think there is an intentionality to it. So, you know, me taking a walk in the woods isn’t worship unless I’m being intentional about acknowledging that I’m in the presence of God, thanking and praising Him.” She, then, gave examples, insisting, “You can worship God when you’re on a walk because you’re acknowledging who He is as Creator. You can worship God in how you raise your kids, because you’re instilling them in them the truths of who the Lord is.” Nancy’s words suggest that when worshippers intentionally seek to glorify God with all they say and do, this act helps bring about an all-encompassing lifestyle of worship.

Several of the pastors mentioned the choice of language as a way they are intentional in a service. Gemma noted how they use language to highlight the all-encompassing nature of worship. She explained, “We’ve even changed our language to reflect that in the sense that we say, ‘musical worship,’ ‘worship through our giving,’ ‘worship through the Word.’ So, we contextualize worship in almost everything that people hear or experience.” Gemma went onto to say that “language creates culture.” The components of her context’s service and the language used to describe them point to this all-encompassing understanding of worship. In theory, this understanding helps Gemma’s congregants respond to God by worshipping in an all-encompassing way. Nancy, too, touched on the importance of language in her context. She explained:

We want our people to understand that the whole of the service is worship, that it’s not just when we’re singing. When we’re hearing the Word of God, we’re acknowledging His voice speaking to us, so that’s an act of worship. Communion is an act of worship because it’s an acknowledgment and [a way to give] thanks for Jesus’ death on the cross.

Nancy's words imply that parts of a service can teach participants the correct definition of biblical worship. As worshipers strive to worship God and seek after Him, He transforms them in the process.²⁷³

A Transformational Experience

According to the interview subjects, as people, the subjects of worship, encounter God, the proper object of worship, and learn to worship Him with all that they are, He begins to change them. Gary shared how this happens practically during his church's worship services. "We are embodying the story of the Bible," he explained, "we are embodying creation, fall, redemption, and restoration." Gary, then, outlined how they embody the biblical narrative in their worship services. They praise God because He is the ultimate point of the Bible. In response, God convicts His people of sin, which leads to confession. Gary assures his congregants of the forgiveness found in Christ, which brings about more worship, and the cycle repeats itself. Gary hopes that practicing these acts in church helps congregants live them out throughout the week. He also acknowledged that this type of transformation is only possible with God. Gary explained, "It can be an aesthetically beautiful service, but it takes an act of God to move in the hearts of people . . . [God uses] these means of grace, like worship, to transform people." Michael, too, talked about how worship services should influence every area of life and change how people act in the world. For example, with every message preached, he hopes that members of his congregation apply the teaching of Scripture to their lives.

Similarly, Gemma talked about the changing power of God and the ways God uses the worship service to transform His people. She described worship as "an essential

²⁷³ See pages 34-41 for more details from the literature review on this point.

part of the way that we commune with the Lord.” As people get close to Him, He changes them. Gemma noted that her congregation expects this. She said, “If we don’t lead people in a personal abiding conversation with Jesus, then what on earth was the point? They’re not coming in the door just to feel good or get inspired . . . we know that the transformational life is so important to God.” Gemma described the transformational life in this way:

God doesn’t leave you as you are. God is not satisfied with you today, not because he doesn’t love you. But because he has more for you . . . God has an invitation for me to come higher, to release something, to lay hold of something new, to be truly changed. He wants to see me look more like Him.

Gemma noted spiritual transformation as one of the primary purposes of her context’s services. “And if we stopped seeing [God’s] movement,” she said, “It’s not worth doing whatever we’re doing.”

Luke also touched on the importance of the worship service as a means by which God transforms His people. Drawing on his previous ministry role as an Episcopal priest, he discussed some of the benefits of following the church calendar. For him, the different seasons of the year provide good tools that bring about spiritual formation and missional living. Luke explained:

You did the prayers for Advent to prepare for the coming of Jesus. And when you understand what that means for the celebration of Christmas and the incarnation and the feast of the Epiphany and the visit of the Magi and what it meant to have the gospel go into the Gentile world, that is all very mission oriented.

He also noted how Lent and the whole Easter season helped his congregation reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus in the passion narratives. He hopes that this reflection spurs his congregants to live their faith out in the world. Luke’s words, along with the interviews,

suggest that the transformation that happens in the worship gathering should lead to Christian mission.

The Elements of a Worship Service and the Pastor's Values

The ways that the subjects described their philosophies of worship influence the elements of their worship gatherings and reveal the values that shape their services.

The Elements of a Worship Service

The subjects talked about the elements of their worship services. Gary described his church service as “liturgical but in a blue-collar way.” He hopes to make traditional liturgy understandable and accessible for every person who attends a service. Gary listed the elements that make up that liturgy, which include reciting the Lord’s Prayer and Apostle’s Creed every week, along with responsive readings and corporate prayers of confession and thanksgiving. Gary’s church also has a weekly call to worship, songs of response, time for individual and corporate confession, an assurance of pardon by the pastor, and a benediction. Commenting on these elements, he noted, “We try to have a high liturgy but with a warmth and accessibility, and where the rhythm [of worship] becomes part of our habits.”

Nancy went through the elements of her church’s worship gatherings. While they do not have a formal liturgy or use prewritten prayers, prayer serves an important role in their services. They have prayer ministers that gather each weekend and pray over each seat before the service begins. During this time, the staff, too, spends intentional time in prayer, asking for an additional “word or message from the Lord” that they should convey during the worship service. Nancy described her church as an evangelical gathering with “a little bit more Pentecostal flavor.” In some services, a member of the

prayer team will receive an image or word from God and pass it along to the pastor and worship leader. They will, then, bring it up during the service and see if it resonates with anyone. Along with these times of prayer, Nancy's church takes communion each week, listens to announcements, sets aside time for preaching, receives an offering, leaves room for silent confession, and ends with a benediction. They, too, have musical worship. Nancy's context chooses songs that focus more on God than the people worshipping.

Similarly, Michael acknowledged the goal to find a "middle ground" when it comes to the use of traditional liturgy. He explained that they go back-and-forth between using liturgy and having a more contemporary worship style. They normally have a welcome, a designated time for announcements, and an offering time. The welcome can either take an informal tone or resemble a more traditional "call to worship" segment. At times, they will have responsive readings, and they normally end their gatherings with a benediction. During services that feel more liturgical, Michael's church will have responsive readings and pray written prayers, like the Lord's Prayer. Every weekend the congregation sings, interacts with Scripture, hears preaching, and takes communion. Michael described communion as "the climax of the service." He also noted that regardless of the changing service order and mixing up the elements each Sunday, they want their worship services to remain "orderly and structured." Part of how they achieve this order is by planning the whole service around a specific teaching theme. They practice expository preaching and go verse by verse. Along with that, Michael's context holds authenticity as a high value, not caring if they are "cool" or "edgy." He explained, "We've kind of pushed against the attractional church model of 'it is all about the brand.'" He went onto say that they don't care much about their church's name being known or

whether congregants put church bumper stickers on their cars or share their social media content.

Bob touched on the essential elements of their services, which include a sermon and singing. They also set aside time for giving announcements, which according to Him, is “worship as well, because it is helping people connect to the life of the church and keeping our community informed on what’s happening.” Bob insists that announcements help congregants get involved, which ideally, promotes to discipleship. His receives an offering each weekend. They also have intentional times of Scripture reading, prayer, and take communion on a semi-regular basis.

Gemma, too, described the essential parts of her services. She explained that they always sing an average of four to five songs on a given weekend. They try to intentionally make this a responsive experience, with space for people to reflect and have “a moment with the Lord devotionally.” They teach out of the Bible and receive an offering. Gemma’s church has a “vision cast” segment where they give updates on what is happening in the church.

Likewise, Luke mentioned the elements of their church services. They include a welcome or call to worship, a time of singing, prayer, and communion. They also have a weekly sermon and benediction.

The Pastor’s Values

The subjects touched on the values that help guide their services. Bob mentioned the reality of technology and social media shortening the attention spans of worshippers. Consequently, creativity is a high value for his context, and he cited creativity as one of the reasons why they avoid repetition and traditional liturgy. For example, Bob

mentioned communion, explaining, “We do not ever want communion to become rote or so repetitious that it becomes mundane, easy to gloss over, or taken for granted.” Because of this, Bob’s church thinks about how they can lead their congregants in communion “in a fresh way” that feels “engaging and meaningful.” This commitment to engage the worshipper flows into every aspect of their worship services.

Bob shared other significant values of his church context. They strive to be a safe place for all people to grow in faith, both believers and unbelievers, in whatever ways feel authentic to them. As such, they design their worship gatherings with all types of people in mind, from committed believers to doubters, seekers, and skeptics. Bob cites this goal as another reason why they do not use a high liturgical format that might feel “inaccessible, distracting, or confusing.”

Gemma also shared thoughts on their intended audience and the difficulty in reaching both seekers and committed believers. She said that, initially, her context was very “seeker friendly.” When asked for specifics about what that meant, she mentioned that most weekends, they would show movie clips and play secular songs. Gemma described the messages at that time as “very low hanging fruit.” Pastors would mention a Scripture passage at the beginning, but each sermon was mostly “a pep talk about spiritual principles.” When asked about any potential problems with that model, she explained, “It was exciting for new believers or people exploring spirituality. But for those of us that have been walking with the Lord . . . it didn’t feel like I was every being challenged . . . it just felt very flat.” In recent years, Gemma’s pastoral team and leaders have changed course. They, now, design their services primarily with committed believers in mind. Sermons are heavily exegetical and expository. According to Gemma,

“we are not leaving that [biblical] book behind until every stone has been turned over.”

When asked about how that value shapes the goal of the worship service, Gemma answered, “We have really taught our people and continue to disciple them on how to study the Word of God and seek out what it says and how it applies to their lives.

Application is a huge deal.”

While Gary’s context leans in Gemma’s direction, he explained how their values allow them to reach both believers and unbelievers. Some of his values include being “Christ-centered” with a commitment to biblical authority. His services are “saturated with Scripture.” Each week, they use passages directly from the Bible for their call to worship, words of assurance, corporate confessions, corporate prayers, and benedictions. Gary’s sermons are biblically based and follow a more expository style of preaching.

Gary, also, highlighted community as a top value. He mentioned a togetherness and described corporate worship as an activity that will continue into eternity. When asked how that value shapes some of their programming decisions, Gary noted, “That’s why we don’t run our sound hotter than we do . . . because worship is corporate, the loudest voice in the room is the collective voice of the congregation singing, not the lead singer.” He described the role of musicians and worship leaders as “supporting the collective church.” The collective voice of the congregation should drive the experience and not the sound from the audio system. Gary suggested that this helps his congregants participate in corporate worship in an authentic way. Over the course of the service, there is enough space for them to respond, sitting, standing, singing loudly, or remaining silent. At other moments, Gary mentioned that they clap, smile, shake hands, and greet each other. He hopes this intentionality makes space for believers and unbelievers alike to

participate as a part of the larger community. Gary also shared that they have a lit and bright space, which in his opinion, creates a friendly, hospitable, and authentic environment.

Michael described six primary values or “hinge points” that shape his church’s worship services. They are creation, rebellion, promise, redemption, mission, and new creation. He mentioned that they consistently remind their congregants of these values and use their worship services to clarify their meaning. Other values in Michael’s church include order and authenticity. They do not try to be overly flashy or produced. He explained, “For us to try and be cooler than we are, or to try to be something we’re not just really goes against the grain . . . some churches thrive on being cool and being the latest and edgy. [We are] the opposite of that.” When it comes to creating orderly worship services, Michael mentioned that while they believe in the spiritual gift of tongues, it is never a central or prominent part of their gatherings. Other values include being “Bible-based” and using an expository preaching style.

Nancy touched on some of the values of her context. Her church has “pillars” that help inform their worship services. For example, they place a high value on biblical literacy. They use their worship gatherings to help congregants learn and understand Scripture. Because of this, Nancy described their preaching as “very expositional.” Along with that, they strive to remain sensitive to the workings of the Holy Spirit. Nancy listed excellence as a value and noted that their more affluent congregation expects a high production standard. She explained, “We actually have a fully paid band . . . we live in a culture where everybody pays for everything, so there is an expectation that you pay for

the best.” Consequently, Nancy’s context has a high bar when it comes to creating and executing their worship services.

Summary of Worship Services and the Mission of God

This section considered how pastors design their worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in every area of public life. It gave a brief overview of each subject’s philosophy of worship. Most interview subjects discussed the importance of having an object of worship, which as Christians is the one Triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Worship happens within a relationship between God and the worshiper. This relationship involves a response marked by a back-and-forth-encounter that happens both individually and corporately. The pastors maintained that worship is more than singing songs. Every aspect of a service, along with all actions taken outside of the church to honor God, serves as an opportunity for worship. God uses these acts to transform worshipers, and despite the various worship styles discussed, acts of worship should lead to a transformed life.

The pastors also touched on the elements of their services and the values they hold when planning their worship gatherings. They talked about different types of worship, including liturgical and contemporary worship styles. The elements of their services included singing songs, reading Scripture, and responding with corporate and individual prayers of confession or thanksgiving. Every pastor, too, stressed the importance of communion, having services based on Scripture, a time for announcements, and receiving an offering. The values mentioned consisted of creative and relevant teaching, Christ-centered services, the importance of biblical authority, and moments for relationship-building. When talking about values, a tension arose around the

primary audience of the service, namely seekers or new believers and long-term Christians.

Worship Practices and the Mission of God

The second research question sought to determine how pastors describe the connection between worship practices and embodying the mission of God in every area of life. To answer these questions, each interview subject described their personal theology of the mission of God. Then, they tied the purpose of the worship gathering to that mission and explained how their services help congregants participate in it.

Theology of the Mission of God

Each subject articulated their understanding of the mission of God. These understandings had both personal and broad implications. Bob explained, “The mission of God is nothing short of reconciling the world to himself and restoring it back to the good for which it was originally intended.” For Gary, God’s mission is “to make all things new.” Michael had a similar understanding, explaining, “The ultimate goal, the ultimate end of the mission of God, is the restoration of all things, the restoration of all creation.” It is “God renewing, not God scrapping what He has made and starting over.” Michael explained how compassion, one of the core values of his church, helps them live out God’s mission. For them, compassion means “giving to people . . . supporting mission partners that are serving people, proclaiming the gospel [locally], and sharing the gospel around the world. And in our community, we help people in crisis.” Nancy described the mission of God as Christians “living out [their] faith during the week.” Gemma emphasized the importance of conversion in mission, saying it was about making

disciples. For her, God's mission is about Him saving and transforming men and women. While the subjects had a similar understanding of Christian mission, they emphasized different particulars.

The Particulars of God's Mission

About Humanity

Several of the interviews emphasized the human-centered nature of God's mission. For example, Gemma defined God's mission as "for the world to know Him, so that we can spend eternity with Him." These words assume that the primary point of God's mission is for Him to save and have a relationship with humankind. Michael spelled out how this mindset can contribute to missional living. When talking about faith, he explained, "[The Christian faith] is not just about a mental assent to a set of beliefs. This is not just a creed. . . all of life is for Jesus. The gospel lays claim to everything from the beginning of creation to the end of the world, and lays claim to every part of your human life."

More Than Humanity

Other interview subjects described God's mission in broader ways. For example, while not denying the personal nature of God's mission, Bob acknowledged, "The gospel to me gets truncated when we make it narrowly about the eternal salvation of human souls." He went on to say that while individual salvation is an essential part of God's mission, it is not the end goal. Drawing on Romans 8, Bob asserted, "The salvation of human souls is just the first fruits of what God is doing. He is saving us so that the world can be saved and reconciled to Him. And that is people but that is creation . . . that is every aspect of every arena of life and the universe." Gary made a similar point. He did

not deny the importance of individual salvation, but he acknowledged that it is more than saving men and women. For him, it starts there but spreads out into every area of life.

Involves Humanity

The interview subjects noted that God's mission involves using people to achieve His purposes in the world. Michael explained, "God does not have a mission for His people. He has a people for His mission . . . we get to join God in His mission in the world." Michael elaborated on this point, saying that it all goes back to blessing others. For him, this call to "be a blessing" is "the center of identity" for followers of Jesus. In Michael's context, this emphasis on being a blessing informs their evangelistic efforts, how they make disciples, and the ways they serve their city.

Gary argued that local churches are tied to specific cities, and God calls those churches to live on mission in those places. This includes serving people but also every part of creation. As believers live missionally, they worship God. Gary noted, "Everything we touch, do, say, and interact with in the world has an eternal end to the glory of God." God blesses His followers so that they can bless others. This makes God's mission more than merely saving humanity. "The people gathered," Gary suggested, "are not the goal of the transformation of the gospel in their lives. They are the medium that God uses to bless the rest of the world."

Bob emphasized the importance of followers of Jesus living out His mission in the world. He described the Church as "the vehicle through which [God] is trying to affect [His salvation and restoration] in the world." To support this point, he referenced Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12. Bob argued that Paul's words are more than a metaphor, noting "God comes to us by embodying Himself in human form, in the form of

Jesus. And then when Jesus ascends to heaven, the incarnation, the embodiment of Jesus on this earth is the Holy Spirit dwelling in His people.” For Bob, this makes God’s people His incarnate body on earth and consequently, an extension of Jesus’ ministry.

Bob showed how this metaphor contributes to missional living. For him, acts of kindness done in Jesus’ name, serving the least of these, and any action carried out on behalf of God all contribute to God’s mission in the world. Bob suggested, “When a neighborhood is restored, or a house rebuilt or a family is provided for, whether warmth in the cold or a meal, or a refugee is welcomed into a community, that all fulfills the mission of God.” For Bob, these are examples of how followers of Jesus serve as His body in the world.

Gemma made a similar note to Bob, referring to the Church as Jesus’ “hands and feet, the work of God on display.” For her context, yes, God wants to transform individuals, but God does this so they can further His kingdom on earth. Discussing their services, she explained, “[We] make sure that people have this opportunity, not just to cross the line of faith, but to step inside of a daily and hourly dialogue with the King of Heaven, for the purpose of transformation, and not just for yourself, but to live for other people.”

Worship and the Mission of God

The Connection between Worship and Mission

Gary described the worship service as a fundamental part of spiritual formation in his context. For him, “The exultation of God and the gospel transformation in the hearts of his people [help them work] towards the renewal of the world.” Different interview subjects described worship as a means of spiritual formation, which helps their churches

embody the mission of God in the world. The sections below will cover how this spiritual formation takes place in corporate worship service. Worship gatherings teach the story of the Bible and give opportunities to understand and participate in Christian mission.

The Worship Service Teaches the Biblical Story

Gary talked a lot about how his worship services allow congregants to learn, practice, and participate in key moments of the biblical story. He compared what happens in their worship services to the intimate presence of God communing with His people in the Old Testament. When congregants worship, they meet God in unique ways, like God dwelling with the Israelites in the tabernacle. For Gary, the worship service provides a partial glimpse of what humanity experienced in the Garden of Eden. It also points ahead to the end of the biblical narrative. Gary explained, “It [corporate worship] is also the future. It is [like the book of] Revelation. There is going to be witnesses singing from all traditions and nations before the throne.” For Gary, the worship gathering is a small glimpse of “the eternal worship service where we are all going to be together.” He explained, “The worship service is the people of God dramatizing, like a dress rehearsal. We are dramatizing the story of the Bible, together in the worship space . . . we are putting this into practice together and enacting it so that we believe it.”

Bob, too, talked about the service mirroring key moments in the biblical narrative. He talked about how Revelation ends with the followers of Jesus united with Him for all of eternity. For Bob, the worship service foreshadows this impending reality. He suggested, “When we . . . worship, we say the truth about where we are, about the brokenness we have experienced because of sin, and how it has entered the world. And

then we also give people a picture of the hope that we have and where [all of creation] is headed.”

Both Bob and Gary talked about how church services remind congregants of the truth of the gospel. Talking about the worship songs used in a service, Bob explained, “We’re going to intentionally look at songs that communicate the largeness of the gospel . . . that God is doing something in this world that’s worth celebrating, that God has changed my life, and he’s inviting me to be a part of changing other people’s lives.” Bob’s services help people understand both what God has done for them and what He calls them to do in the world. Gary echoed this thought, calling His weekend gatherings “gospel sanity hour.” “Between Monday and Saturday,” Gary suggested, “we go literally insane. We forget who we are, who God is, and what Christ has done for us. And we have come back [in the service] to rehearse what is true.” For Gary and Bob, this “dress rehearsal” helps their congregants learn about and live out God’s redemptive story revealed in Scripture.

The Worship Service, Spiritual Formation, and Christian Mission.

The pastors explained the ways they hope their worship services help their congregants participate in the mission of God in the world. For example, Bob outlined how God uses musical worship to transform His followers. When describing musical worship, he explained, “[Worship] songs start to help people wrap their hearts around the reality that God is at work in this world. He’s at work in our lives. And this changes their worldview. It really informs how we think about the world.”

Moreover, Michael touched on how they use times of corporate prayer as a means of spiritual formation. Often, these prayers involve the needs of the world and their city,

along with the individual needs of the congregation. Michael's context uses prayers of blessing to remind their congregants of how God calls them to live in the world. Michael explained, "God makes us into people that will bless the world . . . [these prayers are focused] on the world first and the needs of the congregation next." When asked for specific examples, he mentioned the conflict in the Middle East, along with specific physical, material, and relational needs of the congregation. Michael and the other pastors also encourage their congregants to pray for people in every arena of life, including their schools, places of work, and their neighborhoods.

Michael talked about the ways his congregants participate in the worship service. They stand during the reading of God's Word. They have intentional time for reflection after the message each week. Michael explained that, ideally, this helps his congregation apply these biblical principles to their daily lives. For him, the goal of the worship service is to "remind ourselves of the gospel story and our place in it." Michael noted, "That is a pretty constant, repeated theological refrain. Services should remind us of who Jesus is, what he has done, and who we are because of it . . . that is probably the most stated purpose of why we gather. It is to spur one another on to love and good deeds."

Summary of Worship Practices and the Mission of God

This section considered the connection between worship practices and embodying the mission of God in every area of life. The pastors described their theologies of the mission of God, the connection between the worship service and God's mission, and how their services encourage congregants to fulfill that mission. They explained that God's mission has both broad and personal implications. It involves both individual salvation and the renewal and restoration all of creation. According to the subjects, the mission of

God is about humanity, but it is about more than humanity. It, too, involves believers fulfilling God's purposes as His body on earth. God saves men and women so that, empowered by the Holy Spirit, they can participate in His mission in cities and around the world. He calls believers to love, serve, and care for both local and global communities, participating in a lived apologetic.

The pastors, too, discussed the connection between the worship service and the mission of God. The worship service forms worshipers so they can live out this mission. The pastors outlined intentional ways this happens in their contexts. They use their services to both teach and help congregants participate in the biblical narrative. In addition, the pastors highlighted various ways for worshippers to participate in the service, including musical worship, prayers for both individuals and communities, and opportunities for congregants to engage in the life of the church and embody God's mission in the world. They insisted that the entire worship service should bring about spiritual transformation.

Worship Service Outcomes that Pastors Observe in Congregants

The third research question addressed what church worship service outcomes pastors observe in their congregants. Each interview subject described how they see their congregants living out God's mission in the world.

Outcome #1: Corporate Worship Helps with Embodying God's Mission

Bob talked about the ways that his church fulfills God's mission in both local and global contexts. He mentioned how they combat the global water crisis by partnering with an organization that promotes hygiene and provides freshwater wells in impoverished countries. Moreover, Bob touched on the work his church does to serve

people in their city. They have annual food and clothing drives, along with an entire week where they encourage congregants to serve the community in practical ways.

Gary's church also serves its local community, with its urban location directly shaping its approach to mission. He explained:

Being at this corner of [our city] on [this highway] really, really influences our mission in the neighborhood. So, if we were to find, for instance, a building twice as big a mile away, we wouldn't make the trade because we think there needs to be a church right here.

Gary went on to describe how his congregation lives out this mission. They partner with a nonprofit organization that is deeply rooted in the neighborhood. Together, Gary's church and the nonprofit pool their resources to operate food and clothing pantries. Jackets and other garments are available at the front of the church building, alongside a deep freezer used to store food. Often, the church provides significant support to the nonprofit partner while receiving little or no public recognition for its contributions.

Nancy noted a creative way that her church bridges the gap between corporate worship and embodying God's mission. Three times a year, all sites of her multisite congregation meet in the same location. They have a shortened service, which leaves time to do mission work immediately after it ends. When asked for an example, she said that they recently hosted a food packing event for the entire church. These are opportunities for her congregants "to worship and then tangibly serve as a part of the worship gathering." At another one of these "all church" weekends, they hosted a service fair, which helped their congregants learn about and engage with different ministry partners in the community. They also serve together during the evening on the first Thursday of the month.

Nancy described her context's partner organizations. These partnerships include groups that combat human trafficking and host recovery programs. Moreover, they have a lot of congregation members who serve on leadership boards and are involved in "missionary-minded organizations."

Gemma mentioned intentional ways that she helps her congregants learn about and participate in mission work. In their services, they have "mission moments" where they highlight one of their partners, share any needs, and explain ways that the congregants can get involved and serve. During a recent mission moment, her congregation raised close to one million dollars to benefit their community partners.

Michael called out the tension between congregants serving by giving and serving with their time and presence. He noted, "It's probably more giving and financial support than people volunteering in local places." While he acknowledged a potential tension between the two, he also admitted that they are both ways to participate in God's mission.

Outcome #2: Corporate Worship Helps Congregants Build Relationships

Michael mentioned that they design their worship gatherings so congregants can build relationships with each other. They try and create a welcoming tone. The lights are up, and the music is not too loud. They intentionally try to create an environment before the service that fosters connection. The room does not feel overly serious or somber. Michael noted, "The tone of the room when you walk in is not, 'Oh, let's pray and be quiet.' It's like, 'Hey, let's meet somebody.'" For Michael, "the vibe" of the room helps congregants connect before and after their worship services.

Bob also described various ways his church fosters connection and relationship-building during services. For instance, multiple points throughout the gathering are

intentionally designed to encourage interaction among congregants. On most weekends, time is set aside for participants to introduce themselves to those seated nearby.

Additionally, during the sermon, congregants are invited to answer a question or discuss a section of Scripture together. For Bob, these moments not only build community but also deepen engagement with the message by encouraging practical application. He explained, “When people study the Bible this should be done as a dialogue, not a monologue. We need to learn from each other, sharing both questions and insights. Plus, it is more fun to read Scripture together.”

Outcome #3: Corporate Worship Helps with Evangelism

Bob touched on the connection between evangelism and the mission work that his church does. He explained that one of the goals of his context is for both believers and nonbelievers to consider the truth of the gospel. He explained, “You can come to our church and not have a relationship with Jesus . . . and have all kinds of questions. And just by us providing a space to have those conversations and engage in those [questions] are opportunities for us to fulfill God’s mission.”

Gary explained that the liturgy plays a formative role in preparing his congregants for evangelism. Through the regular rhythms of singing, prayer, and Scripture, congregants are not only nurtured spiritually but also equipped to share their faith with others. In his view, the liturgical structure of the service instills habits and language that naturally extend into evangelistic engagement beyond the church walls. For example, Gary mentioned confession. “If you just sit through the service long enough,” he explained, “you hear everyone in this room confess their failings out loud, I think you’ll very quickly realize that Christianity in the church is not about people who are trying to

improve their lives morally because we just talked about how we need to fall on the mercy of God.” Gary hopes that corporate confession reminds his congregants that grace is available when they make mistakes, so that they will rely more on Jesus. Ideally, they will then show that same grace to others, and their services become welcoming entry points for seekers to consider the claims of Christianity. Gary also presented his views on liturgy as an evangelistic tool to reach unbelievers. He wants non-Christians to see their services as a bit weird, but also compelling. Describing what a seeker would experience, he said, “You look over and see an eighty-seven-year-old grandmother, and then you look to the left and you see a ten-year-old boy, both saying the same words at the same time out loud. It shows that they really believe it.”

Nancy mentioned an evangelistic component to their worship services. Members of her congregation bring friends who do not regularly attend church. She explained, “I think it does sometimes draw people who don’t feel as comfortable going to worship but will want to help serve [the community].”

Michael brought up a tension when it comes to evangelism within his church context. While they do not discourage congregants from bringing unbelievers to church, that is not their primary goal. When talking about God’s mission, he asserted, “[Our] mission is not to invite people to church. [Our] mission is to live out kingdom values in every area of life. As far as the evangelism strategy and stuff like that, it really is more grassroots. You live the gospel where you are.” He acknowledged that evangelism is an important part of God’s mission but admitted that they are not a “highly evangelistic church.” According to Michael, “it has been really tough to disciple people into evangelism.”

Gemma shared a similar tension when it comes to evangelism in her context. They do not have a “proper alter call” each weekend, nor do they emphasize “leading seekers to Jesus” in their service planning meetings. Her services place a greater emphasis on discipleship and equipping people who already follow Jesus.

Outcome #4: Worship Promotes Discipleship and Spiritual Formation

Many of the interview subjects identified spiritual formation as a central goal of the worship service. They expressed a desire for their gatherings to help congregants grow as followers of Jesus. Bob emphasized how his church’s services remind participants both of the world’s brokenness due to sin and of the hope they have in Christ. Ideally, the worship service leaves people with the enduring truth that God will one day set all things right. In this way, worship both points toward that future hope and strengthens believers in the present. Bob hopes these truths will shape worshipers into more faithful disciples. He explained, “All of our worship services aid in discipleship in that we are communicating spiritual truths in every way possible. In the hope that when our people walk out the doors of our building to go out into their week, they are carrying those spiritual truths with them, and they are seeing the world differently.”

Gary talked about how liturgy aids in discipleship in his context. Using corporate confession as an example, he suggested, “If you see someone leading you into confession, you can tell that they are going into confession as well.” For Gary, the liturgy in a worship service models these spiritual practices that God wants his people to possess. As people regularly participate in prayers of thankfulness and confession, they habituate these practices. According to Gary, this helps congregants practice them throughout the week, which promotes discipleship in his congregation. He suggested, “It’s easy to

confess sin because they do it every week. They are learning to repent to God, which makes it easier to repent with spouses and coworkers, etc.” Gary, too, talked about how liturgy helps congregants learn the basic truths of the faith. When worshipers recite the Apostle’s Creed weekly, they learn these truths, which allows them to memorize and remember them.

Gary also outlined how the service should influence congregants’ behavior throughout the week. The gathering should “motivate a grandma to take her grandson who is walking away from God out to lunch.” He also talked about other relationships in the family, noting, “[When] a child does something in service that embarrasses his parents . . . they are reminded that God’s grace is for them, which changes the way they relate to their children at home.” For Gary, these moments influence his congregants’ actions both inside and outside of a worship service.

When it comes to discipleship, the pastors talked about how the service pushes against some of the detrimental mindsets of culture, including individualism and consumerism. Bob acknowledged that individualism and consumerism are the “stream[s] we are all swimming in . . . [the congregants] are consumers, whether we like it or not.” He talked about reasons why, recognizing that much of popular worship music focuses on personal salvation with an “individualistic bent.” Bob said that his church uses that reality to their advantage, thinking about the “felt needs” of the congregation. He explained:

I think our worship services probably do emphasize personal salvation . . . because I think that is where we have our best shot at inviting new people to step into what God’s doing and become a part of it. Because for an individual to be a part of the mission of God, it really does start with they’re coming to a relationship with Jesus themselves.

To achieve that end, Bob's church communicates biblical truth in ways that are "inviting, engaging, and relevant." In Bob's context, they start with the individual and speak to his or her needs, without comprising biblical truth. After people surrender to Jesus, then, they help them take steps into God's larger mission.

Gary outlined a different way of combating individualistic and consumeristic mindsets in the church. His services emphasize corporate discipleship and not individual needs or wants. Gary explained that during their gatherings, people sing songs of lament and joy, regardless of how they feel in the moment. He believes that at least one congregant needs to sing these words, so congregants trade their personal preferences for the good of the whole. Bob explained, "There's going to be elements of the service that make me uncomfortable and stretch me in ways but that is actually forming my heart." For Gary, all of that contributes to discipleship in his context. "We're a terrible church to attend if people are looking for a particular experience," he admitted. Instead of avoiding that, Gary's context leans into it. It might not be the experience that people want, but as they step away from an individualistic mindset, they get a "much better experience."

Nancy talked about how the worship services in her church help congregants grow in faith and become better disciples. For her, the sermon is the primary way that discipleship occurs. Each message includes some sort of action step or question for congregants to reflect on and apply the truths of the sermon to their lives. She hopes that their worship gatherings push against individualistic and consumeristic mindsets. Nancy mentioned that they have designated times to share about serving and outreach opportunities. She noted that several congregants joined the prayer ministry and deepened their prayer lives out of a desire to support these organizations and partnerships.

Moreover, Nancy explained that when her congregants take communion, they “remember what Jesus has done for [them], in order to bring him out into the world.” She mentioned that one of their constant messages is “Sunday beyond Sunday” and “Sunday beyond ourselves.” She longs for her congregation to engage in mission and even have shortened services throughout the year to create intentional space for congregants to serve their local community. Nancy admitted, though, that the attendance drops during these “Serve Sunday” services.

Likewise, Michael talked about individualistic and consumeristic mindsets in his congregation. He explained that the people in his context do not have a strong allegiance to any specific church or worshipping community and “move churches all the time.” To combat this trend, they try to regularly speak to the corporate, communal, and missional aspects of the gospel. Michael explained, “One thing we say on a regular basis is that this is not just a place to come and get a little message to make your life better. That is not what church is.” He reminds his congregants that the church is ultimately about the community of God. Yes, people encounter Jesus in a personal way, but then, He invites them into God’s family to participate in His “family mission.”

Luke said that individualism and consumerism were not big issues in his congregation. According to him, his church members let go of their personal wants and preferences to participate in the life of the church. He said that their community group efforts are what encourage people to be a part of the greater church whole and not solely think about themselves.

Lastly, Gemma mentioned the consumerism in her context and how they use the service to push against this mindset. Acknowledging consumerism today, she noted,

“Because it is reinforced everywhere . . . I think it’s even easier for people to just consume, consume, consume, and then, it becomes truly an addiction.” While people naturally gravitate toward what benefits them individually, Gemma reminds her congregants that God created them to contribute to His mission.

Summary of The Worship Service Outcomes that Pastors Observe in Congregants

This section examined the church worship service outcomes that pastors observe in their congregants. After examining the data, it outlined four primary outcomes. First, the pastors observed their congregation members embodying God’s mission in tangible ways. These efforts include global work, like providing access to clean drinking water and promoting hygiene. The mission work also occurs locally, as congregants participate in food and clothing drives, work with local nonprofits, promote recovery programs, and combat human trafficking. Some of the pastors noted how they provide regular opportunities to serve during the week and weekend. They all mentioned an offering segment each weekend, so congregants can support God’s mission financially. Second, the pastors explained that worship services help congregants build relationships with each other. Third, corporate worship services should promote evangelism. Lastly, the subjects discussed how worship gatherings lead to the discipleship and spiritual formation of congregants. The interview subjects talked about some of the common issues in our cultural moment, including individualism and consumerism.

Worship Service Outcomes that Pastors Desire to Observe in Congregants

The final research question examined outcomes from a church worship service that pastors desire to observe in their congregants. The interview subjects talked about their goals for their congregations. They also highlighted different growth areas, and the metrics that they use to determine if they are meeting those goals.

The Pastors' Goals and their Congregations

Bob articulated several goals for his context. He called the worship service “the engine of the church” and “the main element of what a church does.” One of his goals is continued discipleship in the service. As a large congregation, the weekend worship gathering serves as an entry way into the life of the church. It provides a first step, but Bob wants to see more discipleship opportunities for seasoned believers in his services. He explained, “We form them in discipleship, through the teaching and through worship and through prayer and through all those elements. And then we send them out into the week to live out the mission of the gospel.” To achieve this goal, Bob outlined a model that he called “decentralized ministry.” He described decentralized ministry in this way:

[We must] get to a place where the people who call our church their church home feel their own sense of ownership of the kingdom and mission. And they're actively engaging in that spiritual act of worship day-to-day, seeking God, prayer, understanding what His Word says, becoming good students of the Bible, and then living it out in their relationships, their community, and in their service.

Bob's words reveal a desire for his services to become less of an entry way and more of a discipleship hub, where “[the congregants] come together to be refreshed, to be filled, to gather corporately, to break bread, and be reminded of spiritual truths . . . when the service is over, we're sending them back out to the mission field.”

Michael also identified expanding discipleship opportunities as one of his goals. He aims to increase congregant participation in church small groups, believing this will enhance their theological understanding of God and Scripture and empower them to live more faithfully throughout the week.

Protentional Growth Areas

Bob brought up potential areas of growth. For example, he wants his context to look for other opportunities outside of the weekend service for congregants to encounter the gospel and learn biblical truth. He hopes for more regular and deeper discipleship opportunities but acknowledged that it is hard to measure whether this is happening. Bob explained:

How do we measure the biblical literacy of our church? I don't know how we measure the prayerfulness of our church . . . that they are offering up their bodies as living sacrifices? When they go to work, when they care for their families, when they hang out with neighbors, when they're at school? How do they see these things as actual worship, as they learn geometry or design a building or gather around a firepit. How do we measure those things?

While Bob acknowledged the difficulty of assessing these aspects of a lived apologetic in the world, he did hint that liturgy might help. He acknowledged that liturgy teaches congregants the core truths of the faith. He wonders if long-term followers of Jesus can learn these truths by participating in more traditional liturgical or repetitious worship gatherings.

Similarly, Gemma cited increased biblical literacy as one of her context's growth areas, along with a growing passion for personal evangelism and the "practice of invite to be elevated." Lastly, she mentioned regular attendance as a growth area. Her congregants only attend one to two weekends per month.

Similarly, Gary talked about areas of growth. For example, he acknowledged that they need to get better at celebrating during worship. While his tradition tends to prioritize reflective moments in the service, “[the services] do not always have the same energy when it comes to celebrating what God has done and giving [Him] thanks.”

Nancy gave two main growth areas. She wants a “critical mass of people who know they belong and feel cared for.” She also wants her congregation to live more missionally in intentional ways.

Luke discussed some of his congregations’ growth areas. For him, the most significant area is in the world of tithing. While his church is doing well financially, he mentioned that giving for a significant portion of the congregation still hovers around two percent of its income. They have taught on giving and offered financial literacy classes. Luke hopes that these efforts will bump that number up to five percent.

Michael cited evangelism as their most significant growth area. He wants to create space for people in his congregation to share their faith. He also wants better metrics to determine if people are growing as disciples at his church.

The Difficulty of Metrics

Most of the interview subjects talked about the difficulty of metrics when it comes to discipleship. They expressed that it is hard to know if congregants are truly embodying God’s mission in every area of life. Michael touched on a few tangible metrics, explaining that they measure attendance, giving numbers, and how many people view their church website each week. Bob, too, talked about numbers. They measure how many people sign up for outreach projects and participate in church-wide mission initiatives. For example, of the five to six thousand people who attend services each

week, about eleven thousand of them sign up to serve. Bob, too, cautioned about thinking too hard about metrics. He questioned, “I wonder if those are things that we are meant to measure . . . I don’t need to know if Suzie Q who attends my church is praying on her knees every day, and how well she has the book of Philippians memorized . . . That’s kind of between her and Jesus.” Still, Bob believes that he has a duty to take the “spiritual temperature” of the congregation and consider whether they are growing as disciples. Bob discussed relevant questions that he asks himself, like “Are they living [the teachings of Jesus] out in their lives? And is it yielding gospel fruit? Is it fulfilling God’s mission in their lives. I just don’t know where the line is.” For Bob, metrics of discipleship are difficult to determine and tricky to put into practice.

Lastly, Nancy, talked about numbers as their primary discipleship metric. Her church uses PCO to monitor how many people participate in mission opportunities. She estimated that around 20% of her congregation participates and 80% does not. Nancy explained, “Our greatest metric is whether people in worship services encounter God in some tangible way, and in response, take a step forward on their spiritual journeys.” Like the other subjects, however, spiritual growth and discipleship prove difficult to measure.

Summary of The Worship Service Outcomes that Pastors Desire to Observe in Their Congregants

The final research question sought to determine what church worship service outcomes pastors desire to observe in congregants. The interview subjects described the goals that they have for their churches, discussed areas of growth, and the metrics they use to assess goals and those desired growth areas. They mentioned more opportunities for discipleship as a common goal. The most common growth areas were greater biblical

literacy within the congregation and more celebratory worship services. The subjects, too, described ways that they want their congregants to live missionally, including an increased emphasis on evangelism, attending services in-person more regularly, and a higher giving percentage.

Every interview subject noted the difficulty of having metrics that judge spiritual formation and discipleship. Still, the metrics they do use include attendance numbers, the amount of people that participate in serving opportunities, and “the spiritual fruit” in their lives, all of which contribute to embodying the mission of God in the world. However, one pastor cautioned against an overemphasis on metrics.

Summary of Findings

This chapter examined how six pastors design their worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in every area of life. It considered both their personal philosophies of worship and theological understandings of the mission of God. The subjects discussed the purpose of worship in the Church, their values when planning worship services, the essential elements of these services, and how their worship services help congregants live missionally in the world. Common themes include both the personal and cosmic dimensions of God’s mission—He works to redeem and restore humanity, along with the rest of creation. The pastors also described the worship service as a means of spiritual formation and discipleship. Worship services both remind and equip participants to live on mission in the world. As such, worship is more than singing songs or attending church services. God invites His people to worship in every area of life and participate in His mission. While difficult to measure, the pastors insisted that they look for ways to assess whether this is happening in their congregations.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Many Christians have forgotten the primary purpose of worship in the Church.²⁷⁴

These followers of Jesus have separated worship and mission, leading to negative stereotypes of believers in the world.²⁷⁵ To help with this problem, the purpose of this study was to explore how pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in every area of life. It also considered some of the tensions that pastors face when carrying out this task. This study assumed that a connection exists between corporate worship and Christian mission. It believed that worship gatherings should train and compel participants to embody a lived apologetic in the world. The following research questions guided the study and informed interviews with six pastors who design worship services:

1. In what ways do pastors design church worship services to help congregants embody the mission of God in public life?
2. How do pastors describe the connection between worship practices and embodying the mission of God in every area of life?
3. What church worship service outcomes do pastors observe in congregants?
4. What church worship service outcomes do pastors desire to observe in congregants?

²⁷⁴ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 8.

²⁷⁵ Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 24–26.

Chapter one presented the disconnect between the worship service and Christian mission. In chapter two, the researcher considered literature areas that explore the connection between corporate worship and the mission of God. The literature review provided the necessary context for this study. It gave a biblical framework of Christian mission. Then, it considered how this framework informs an understanding of salvation and that understanding's influence on biblical worship. Lastly, the literature review discussed three culture shifts that affect corporate worship services.

Chapter three provided the methodology for the study. The researcher conducted a basic qualitative study to answer the research questions. This process allowed him to focus on the relevant details and find any patterns that emerged within the research. Chapter four gave the qualitative data that resulted from interviews. The researcher interviewed six pastors who are involved in the planning of their church's worship gatherings. He used an interview protocol that helped guide the conversations and discussed their philosophies of worship, the pastors' understandings of the mission of God, and their goals and outcomes for their worship services. The pastors who participated in these interviews come from a variety of denominations that practice different worship styles.

This chapter will present the conclusions of this project. It will summarize the study and its results. The researcher will elaborate on these conclusions and make connections between the reviewed literature and interview data. Then, he will offer practical recommendations and present questions for further research.

Summary of the Study and Findings

Because the Bible connects Christian worship with church mission, this study began by outlining a biblical framework of the mission of God. It explored four relevant passages, including Genesis 1, Genesis 2, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, and Romans 12:1-2. Genesis 1 connects humanity's role in the mission of God with the very fabric of creation. God sets men and women apart as His image-bearers, which, in its original context, implies a type of royal authority. God tasks humanity to rule over creation as His representatives, filling the earth and promoting good as an act of worship. Genesis 2 reveals another dimension of this authority, as God calls human beings to work and care for creation. These same verbs describe the tasks of Israelite priests, which connects God's mandate in Genesis 2 with worship. Men and women steward, build upon, and care for creation, so every act done in the world provides an opportunity to worship the Creator God.

The Apostle Paul makes a similar point in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. In this chapter, Paul describes the mission of God as an all-encompassing vocation for all believers. The people of God participate in the ministry of reconciliation and work toward the renewal of creation. Jesus' death and resurrection continue to influence the present world as He empowers and works through His followers. Reconciliation is something that God does for us and through us. God makes us new creations so we can participate in His mission in the world. Romans 12:1-2 pick up this idea. The passage shows how Christians embody the values, practices, and actions of God's mission in the world. Paul's "living sacrifice" analogy implies that every aspect of a Christian's life should be seen as an

opportunity to worship. Using cultic language, he links acts of worship with the mission of God.

From there, this study reviewed relevant literature on a biblical understanding of salvation, a biblical understanding of worship, and culture shifts that influence worship services in the Church. The biblical understanding of salvation is holistic. It involves both individuals and all of creation. Salvation occurs by the gracious power of God, beginning and ending with Him. God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is the ultimate cause of salvation. His saving act influences every area of life, making it comprehensive. Salvation has economic, political, natural, and physical components. God saves men and women to influence these areas for the sake of His kingdom and commands His followers to go and bless others.

This understanding of salvation affects the way believers view the kingdom of God. The salvific work of Jesus entails the inbreaking kingdom of God on earth, along with the renewal and restoration of creation. Consequently, God calls His followers to live on mission as a foretaste of that kingdom. The mission of God involves reconciling all of creation, and this reconciling work should flow into every area of life. The early church modeled this behavior with how they cared for and served the needy in their communities.

This conception of salvation and mission impacts the way followers of Jesus view worship. Every act of life provides an opportunity to worship God. Worship is not limited to an act that happens inside of a church building during a worship service. Instead, the worship that happens inside of a service continues outside of the church walls. The worship service aids in this task by helping believers experience God's presence and

grow as God's disciples. The worship gathering also enables a lived apologetic in the world. As believers experience God's presence, the Holy Spirit makes them more like Jesus. This transformation reorders their desires and influences the ways they approach and live in the world. Worship services should equip believers to combat the world's brokenness and live as glimpses of God's inbreaking kingdom on earth.

The paper considered three shifts that influence worship in the church. Overtime, God's people began embracing an individualistic spirituality, a private spirituality, and a consumer-driven spirituality. All three shifts have impacted the American church. Consequently, a disconnection exists between the worship service and embodying the mission of God in every area of life.

Then, the paper gathered and analyzed interview data from six pastors involved in planning worship services at their respective churches. Each of the interview subjects cited God as the primary object of worship. They stressed a back-and-forth encounter between God and the worshipper. For example, Gary defined the worship service as a dialogue that happens at both individual and corporate levels. The other subjects made similar points. The pastors all saw worship as an all-encompassing lifestyle and believed that God uses the worship service to transform participants.

The interviews revealed the essential elements of a worship gathering. These elements include a welcome, singing, the reading of Scripture, prayer, preaching, and a benediction. While the subjects did not agree on how often to observe communion, they all highlighted it as an essential part of worship services. The interviews also brought up differences in worship styles. Some of the subject's churches use a more liturgical model

while others have more contemporary services. Still, all subjects highlighted the importance of intentionality when planning a worship gathering.

All the pastors discussed the values that inform the planning of their worship services. These values include Christ-centered worship, Bible-based preaching, creativity, togetherness, paying attention to the context and people who attend the church, and reaching both seekers and committed believers. The interview subjects presented their understanding of God's mission and highlighted the connection between the worship service and the mission of God, even as they noted tensions with or impediments to holding these together. They gave their intended outcomes for the worship gathering in their individual contexts, including embodying God's mission, building relationships, encouraging evangelism, and promoting discipleship. The subjects also compared their intended outcomes with the outcomes that they actually observe in their congregants and highlighted potential areas of growth.

Discussion of Findings

This section will compare the literature and interview research to identify similarities, tensions, and other important themes.

Similarities:

After comparing the literature review with my interview data, I noticed several similarities. First, all the data confirmed a connection between the worship service and God's mission in the world. N.T. Wright makes this point directly, linking God's mission with acts of worship than happen inside of a worship gathering.²⁷⁶ Smith makes a similar

²⁷⁶ Wright, *The New Testament*, 362.

point, noting, “We worship for mission; we gather for sending; we center ourselves in practices of the body of Christ for the sake of the world; we are reformed in the cathedral to undertake our image-bearing commission to reform the city.”²⁷⁷ Michael’s words echoed these points, insisting that “all of life is worship.” Likewise, Bob agreed that worship happens beyond the corporate gathering or worship service. For Him, it was all-encompassing. All the data maintained that worship happens both inside and outside of the church walls. The act of worship is not confined to a service on the weekend, but instead, should spill into every day of the week.

Second, the interview data and literature both described the worship service as a means of spiritual formation and transformation. Gary acknowledged this belief, insisting that acts of God change the hearts of worshippers. Michael mentioned his desire for his sermons to influence the actions of his congregants throughout the week. Gemma made a similar point, noting, “God doesn’t leave you as you are . . . God has an invitation for me to come higher, to release something, to lay hold of something new, to be truly changed. He wants to see me look more like Him.”

I agree with the interview subjects. God promises to sanctify His people and uses the worship gathering to transform their hearts and lives.²⁷⁸ The literature confirmed this belief. In Romans 12, Paul directly links corporate worship with daily life. Christopher Wright shows that a person’s relationship with God should change the way he or she lives.²⁷⁹ The early church heeded this call and saw the mission of God as a fundamental

²⁷⁷ Smith, *Imagining*, 154.

²⁷⁸ Phil 1:6.

²⁷⁹ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 53.

part of its identity.²⁸⁰ Labberton summarizes this point, arguing, “Justice and mercy are not add-ons to worship, nor are they the consequences of worship. Justice and mercy are intrinsic to God and therefore intrinsic to the worship of God.”²⁸¹ Biblical worship of God should compel participants to love others.²⁸² All the data confirmed that living a life of love and service outside of a church gathering is an essential part of genuine worship.

Yet, both the literature and interview subjects called out the tension of a disconnect between worship services and Christian mission. Labberton argues that caring for the least of these is regularly overlooked in conversations about worship.²⁸³ Many 21st-century followers of Jesus live as “faithful consumers,” not necessarily faithful worshipers both inside and outside of the church walls.²⁸⁴ They see mission as voluntary acts that happen outside of and separate from the worship service.²⁸⁵ While the interview subjects mentioned some of the success they have had connecting the worship gathering to missional living, they, too, articulated growth areas. Bob wanted his services to become a “discipleship hub.” Gemma mentioned an increase in biblical literacy which, ideally, would help her congregants live on mission. Nancy, too, wanted her congregation to participate in outreach efforts in more intentional ways. Michael desired his congregants to grow in their evangelism efforts. While the literature and interviews

²⁸⁰ Smither, “Learning from Patristic,” 35.

²⁸¹ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 38.

²⁸² Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 21.

²⁸³ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 39.

²⁸⁴ Smith, *Who’s Afraid*, 104.

²⁸⁵ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 44.

present similar goals for corporate worship, they all reveal a separation between the service and the outcome of embodying God's mission in the world.

Tensions:

Analyzing the connection between the corporate worship service and the mission of God revealed tensions in both the literature and interview data.

Tension #1: Discipling Believers vs. Reaching Seekers

First, a tension exists between reaching seekers and equipping committed believers. While evangelism and discipleship are both essential aspects of Christian mission, it seems like churches feel the pressure to choose between the two in the worship service. Gemma called out this dilemma directly. When she joined her church staff, it was "seeker friendly." The pastoral and worship team used movie clips and secular songs to connect with non-believers. Gemma described the sermons as "low-hanging fruit" that used Scripture to make points about accessible spiritual principles. Her church's target audience was new believers, and seasoned disciples were left unchallenged. Gemma described these services as "very flat." Eventually, her context intentionally moved away from this seeker-friendly model. Now, Gemma and the teaching team use an expository preaching style, allowing them to dig deep into specific passages of Scripture. I think that both models have their advantages, but Gemma's words highlight the difficulty of reaching both audiences at the same time.

Bob explained that his context thinks about and tries to reach both groups, but when forced to choose, normally gears the worship gathering towards seekers. Discipleship for committed believers happens in small groups and other classes outside of the service proper. Both Bob and Gemma's mindsets potentially lead to Schattauer's

“inside and out” view of worship in the Church. This view separates the worship service from God’s mission in the world as two distinct activities.²⁸⁶ Nevertheless, mission is the proper response to the worship service, so by disconnecting the two, pastors defeat one of the purposes of corporate worship all-together. If pastors aim to reach unbelievers at the expense of discipleship, they will create shallow worshipers on both ends of the spectrum, committed believer and seeker alike. Shallow worshipers might fail to grasp the deep truths of the Christian faith, including biblical salvation and the holistic mission of God. If a pastor “lowers the bar” to reach seekers in a worship service, he or she will potentially lower the discipleship bar for every congregant in the church.

Consequently, I think the Church should expand its understanding of discipleship to include all groups of people at various levels of faith, including believers, doubters, seekers, scoffers, etc. Evangelism and discipleship are not two separate acts. Instead, evangelism is a part of the discipleship process. For example, when a scoffer simply walks into a church building on the weekend, that is an act of discipleship. Whenever a seeker meets with pastors to ask foundational questions about Christianity, that is a discipleship act. Doubters take steps of discipleship whenever they admit their questions and look for resources. The worship service should support and aid in all these action steps. Worship gatherings can address the questions of doubters or seekers and tear down the skeptical walls of scoffers. Elements of the service that might prove less accessible to seekers still provide a window into the life and worldview of the Church. When handled correctly, these moments do not necessarily push away or alienate non-Christians. Instead, they can serve as onramps into and pictures of the abundant life that Jesus offers

²⁸⁶ Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly,” 2.

and what it looks like to worship Him as the people of God. Corporate worship practices are not fences that separate Christians and non-Christians. They are invitations to experience God at all levels of the discipleship process. Local churches should unapologetically practice acts of worship in their gatherings. Pastors should not intentionally exclude non-believers, but they can challenge a consumeristic approach to faith by offering all participants—regardless of where they are with Jesus—a vision of the sacred and an alternative way to navigate life

Because of this study, I am convinced that the primary purpose of a worship service is to make and equip disciples at all levels when it comes to faith in Jesus. This understanding of “all-level” discipleship will aid believers in evangelism. Equipped and empowered disciples should naturally look for ways to serve others and invite their friends, coworkers, or neighbors to church. Moreover, all-level discipleship will equip believers and help them understand the major themes of this paper. Pastors can speak in depth about the biblical understanding of holistic salvation and how it connects to biblical worship and church mission. Moreover, viewing the worship gathering as a place of discipleship for all levels, regardless of where a person is on the faith spectrum, pushes against individualistic and consumeristic tendencies within the Church.

Tension #2: Liturgical vs. Contemporary Worship Styles

The data, too, reveals a tension between liturgical and contemporary worship styles. Bob’s church uses a more contemporary style of worship. His context places a high value on creativity, leading them to avoid a more liturgical worship model. Bob suggested that repeating an act or doing the same thing every week in a service diminishes its impact in a worship gathering. It can make worship mundane and deprive

it of meaning. For Bob, formal liturgy, at times, can feel distracting, inaccessible, or confusing for some church attenders. Weekly repetition within a service might cause participants to take the acts of worship for granted and “go through the motions.” With the value creativity in mind, Bob wants to keep worship “fresh,” so the service feels “engaging and meaningful.” His primary goal is to meet participants in an incarnational way that they might experience the powerful, transforming presence of God.

By contrast, Gary regularly uses traditional liturgy in his worship gatherings and highlights the benefits of repetition in the service. Every weekend his church has a call to worship, recites the Lord’s Prayer and Apostle’s Creed, incorporates responsive readings and prayers of confession, has an assurance of pardon, observes communion, and ends with a benediction. While Gary explained that they go through their liturgy in a way that makes it accessible for seekers or new believers, his primary goal is to habituate these spiritual rhythms of worship into the worshipper. He believes that if congregants regularly engage in these worship practices inside the church walls, they will live them out during the week.

For example, the call to worship each service reminds congregants of God’s invitation to experience His presence. Gary insisted that regular acts of confession in church make it easier to confess your sins to others outside of a church service. He mentioned the benediction as a way to remind worshipers of the encounter they had with God, helping them remember the peace, hope, joy, and grace they just experienced. Ideally, in response, believers will extend that same joy, grace, and peace to others throughout the week. Gary insisted that liturgy allows believers to remember and participate in the creation, fall, redemption, and restoration narrative arc of Scripture.

Smith made a similar point in the literature, noting, “Christian worship should reenact the narrative of the gospel week by week in order to teach us how to find ourselves in the story.”²⁸⁷ Similarly, Luke mentioned the importance of traditional liturgy and the power of the church calendar to prepare believers for worship throughout the year. Regardless of their worship style, both groups want congregants to encounter God in a worship service and experience His transforming presence.

The Benefits of Repetition for Discipleship

The literature, too, spoke to the importance and power of repetition for spiritual formation. Smith argues that spiritual formation and discipleship happen through repetition.²⁸⁸ Liturgy is anchored in the defining stories that people use to find identity, meaning, and purpose in the world. These stories influence our habits and actions. Smith explains, “Liturgies—whether ‘sacred’ or ‘secular’—shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world. In short, liturgies make us certain kinds of people.”²⁸⁹ While the tension between contemporary and liturgical worship styles remains, Smith’s words should remind pastors of the power of repetition to both teach their congregants the biblical story and provide opportunities for them to encounter God in a transformational way. Bob’s point stands. Pastors should leverage creativity in their worship gatherings and find intentional ways to meet their congregants on their own terms. Worship services should not bore participants. Still, repetition does not necessarily mean a lack of creativity and repeating the same

²⁸⁷ Smith, *Who’s Afraid*, 75.

²⁸⁸ Smith, *Imagining*, 33.

²⁸⁹ Smith, *Desiring*, 25.

practices every service does not automatically make those acts mundane or rote.

Michael's approach for a "middle ground" between liturgical and contemporary worship styles might serve pastors in incorporating repetition in both compelling and useful ways.

Important Themes:

The interview and literature data also revealed several important themes that pastors should keep in mind when planning corporate worship services.

Theme #1: The Language about Worship Matters

First, the language that people use in worship gatherings matters. The literature reveals the negative effects of reducing worship to one act inside of a service. The shift toward a private spirituality made faith a primarily personal endeavor. Worship was reduced to an act that happened inside of a service, usually associated with singing.

Gemma acknowledged this reality and outlined how her context corrects this incomplete understanding of worship. She and her team find creative ways to explain how every part of a service provides an opportunity to worship. For Gemma, this helps her congregants think holistically about worship.

Nancy made a similar point. She explained, "We want our people to understand that the whole of the service is worship." Language helps congregants think holistically about worship and pushes against individualistic, personal, and consumer-driven approaches to faith. Dean, Labberton, Smith, and Bellah all present the detrimental consequences of a "me-focused" attitude toward Christianity. Careful language about worship pushes against this attitude and reminds congregants that their individual fulfillment is not the ultimate point or purpose of the worship service.

Theme #2: The Language about Salvation Matters

Similarly, the language used to describe salvation matters. The literature covers the negative effects of a reduced or incomplete understanding of salvation. While biblical salvation is holistic and comprehensive, churches normally emphasize salvation's impact on the individual. Labberton calls out a potential problem with this mindset, suggesting "Salvation subtly becomes more about providing a warm blanket of cultural safety than about stepping out into the bracing winds of spiritual sacrifice."²⁹⁰ Congregants come to church to be comforted but not convicted, "spiritually fed" but not challenged.

This view of salvation impacts the way Christians approach and participate in God's mission. Gemma defined God's mission as "for the world to know him." Still, the literature pushes against this reduced conception of salvation. Salvation is spiritual, social, economic, political, natural, and physical.²⁹¹ It is not solely about God saving individuals. Instead, biblical salvation is about God calling and saving individuals, and then redeeming, equipping, empowering, and using them in the world. Jesus' saving work involves freeing men and women from spiritual oppression. It also means good news for the poor and those with physical ailments. Some of the pastors made this point. For example, Gary stated that salvation includes individuals and all of creation. Bob insisted that God saves individuals to live as an extension of His body on earth.

The way pastors talk about salvation impacts the connection between the worship service and the mission of God. If salvation is all about the individual, the Christian faith can easily become, as Labberton puts it, "a theology of self-absorption."²⁹² If God's

²⁹⁰ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 16.

²⁹¹ Goheen and Mullins, *The Symphony*, 23.

²⁹² Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 80.

saving act becomes, first-and-foremost, about saving me, then I might neglect my responsibility to live missionally in the world. If salvation can start with the person, it can easily end there, too, as believers fail to grasp the missional implications of the gospel.

Still, Smith's words call followers of Jesus to action. He explains, "The church is the stage where God's drama is played out; as such, we Christians have a responsibility to 'act well,' we might say, to faithfully play out the love of God in the church as a community of love and justice."²⁹³ While pastors should not neglect the personal aspect of salvation, they need to place that in the larger scope of God's redemptive story. Taking this call seriously will better equip followers of Jesus to live on mission in the world.

Theme #3: The Language about Metrics Matters (But is Difficult)

Lastly, both the literature and interview data present missional living as a sign of discipleship, but the pastors called out that it is difficult to find accurate metrics to judge genuine discipleship. Worship should reorient a Christian's ultimate loves and desires toward the mission of God in the world.²⁹⁴ The Church cannot separate corporate worship from the call to promote justice and love in sacrificial ways.²⁹⁵

However, the pastors mentioned the difficulty of measuring whether their congregants are embodying the mission of God in every area of life. Bob wants his congregants to feel a sense of ownership when it comes to living out God's mission in the world. Still, he mentioned the difficulty of judging whether this is actually happening. For example, Bob questioned what percentage of a church needs to be engaged in

²⁹³ Smith, *Who's Afraid*, 79.

²⁹⁴ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 13.

²⁹⁵ Labberton, *The Dangerous Act*, 22.

outreach efforts for a pastor to absolutely know that his or her congregants are being disciplined. Also, even if people sign up for serve days or outreach projects, that does not necessarily mean they are embodying the mission of God in every area of life. Bob questioned if the Church should even measure these things. He asked, “I wonder if those are things that we are meant to measure . . . that’s kind of between [the congregants] and Jesus.” Bob’s words beg the question, how can pastors adequately judge if a Christian is embodying God’s mission in the world? While I do not have a definitive answer, it would serve the Church well to consider that question and help believers embody the mission of God in every area of life.

Recommendations for Practice

Considering the findings described above, the Church is well advised to see all-level discipleship as the primary goal of the worship service. This call goes back to some of the final words of Jesus on earth.²⁹⁶ Reaching the lost and appealing to seekers or new believers are essential parts of living out Jesus’ call in Matthew 28:18-20. Still, the worship gathering is “ground zero” for spiritual formation. Services are essential ways that believers experience God’s presence, grow as disciples, and learn how to embody a lived apologetic in the world. Ideally, all-level discipleship will strengthen evangelism in the Church. Believers will grow in their faith, and seekers, too, can participate and take steps in their personal discipleship journeys during a worship service. They can see in real time the practices and benefits of following God. Non-believers can start habituating these acts of worship before they even begin to trust in Jesus. To put it another way,

²⁹⁶ Matt 28:18-20.

churches should invite seekers to take steps of faith, even before their faith is legitimate. This is not to say that every part of the worship service is open to non-Christians. However, God can use Christian worship to convict, call, save, and create new worshipers in the context of a service. The worship gathering may serve as a catalyst for genuine faith.

Pastors should plan their worship gatherings to achieve these goals, which should combat overly individualistic and consumer-driven approaches to the Christian faith. The Bible insists that a tree will be known by its fruit.²⁹⁷ God empowers His people to live lives of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness and self-control.²⁹⁸ The way we treat each other is a part of pointing people to Jesus and reaching the lost.²⁹⁹ Thus, by God's grace, the Church should push against the aforementioned culture shifts for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Moreover, pastors should pay attention to the language they use with their staffs and congregants. Too often, church leaders use the word "worship" to describe the singing that happens in a service. This can result in a diminished understanding of worship, which may inadvertently hinder believers from embodying God's mission in every area of life. When worship is misunderstood or minimized, the Church's engagement in mission often suffers as well.

Similarly, the language used to describe salvation is important. While pastors must never forget the individual and personal aspects of God's saving work, they must

²⁹⁷ Luke 6:43-45.

²⁹⁸ Gal 5:22-23.

²⁹⁹ John 17:20-21.

teach their congregants that God's salvation is bigger than them. It involves all of creation. Jesus saves people to use them in the world and calls them to participate in His ministry of reconciliation. A narrow understanding of biblical salvation can lead to a diminished view of the Christian's role in God's mission. Consequently, pastors should find opportunities within their services to articulate salvation in holistic and comprehensive ways.

Lastly, the Church should use creative repetition and lean into the worship practices that followers of Jesus have used throughout the ages. Congregants can fall into the trap of a rote, "going through the motions" approach to worship in both liturgical and contemporary services. Still, people learn through repetition. They are changed by their habits. As such, repetition should be leveraged creatively and intentionally to make, teach, and equip disciples at all levels in the Church. Even after this study, I will continue to formulate this idea, considering a type of "incarnational repetition" to meet people where they are at for the sake of God's kingdom and mission in the world.

Ideally, incarnational repetition will engage participants in winsome ways that they can understand. Like the Incarnate Christ, this type of repetition will meet worshipers at their level, in a way that is intentional, engaging, and transformational. Bob mentioned "decentralized ministry," in which congregants own their personal spiritual growth and take mission seriously. I wonder if a creative, incarnational approach to repetition might help achieve that goal. Nevertheless, I believe taking discipleship seriously in a worship gathering and seeing every element of a service as a means of spiritual formation will help congregants, believers and seekers alike, to embody the mission of God in every area of life.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on the connection between the worship service and embodying the mission of God in the world. It also discussed multiple tensions that impede that connection. As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the research can be. Therefore, pursuit of the following areas of study could be highly valuable for pastors and church leaders. Questions like, does congregation size affect a church's discipleship and spiritual formation processes? In addition, how do pastors judge if a congregant is legitimately embodying the mission of God in every area of life? The interview subjects all talked about the benefits and difficulties of establishing and using discipleship metrics. What are those metrics? How do pastors assess if congregants are living on mission in their workplaces and neighborhoods? How might corporate worship serve as a formative space for equipping congregations to embody God's mission? Are there opportunities in the worship service for the whole congregation to hear and celebrate the ways God is using them in the world? To aid in finding an answer, pastors should start with the best practices on communicating how to get involved in the outreach efforts of their churches. They must give clear examples of how these efforts flow into their congregants' day-to-day lives.

Moreover, if worship services aid in all-level discipleship and help Christians embody God's mission, what role does the pastor play in this process? Should pastors be active participants in planning the entire worship service experience? Likewise, how front and center should pastors be when it comes to leading outreach efforts? If pastors, the primary leaders in the church, are not modeling Christian mission, how likely is it that a missional fervor will take root in the hearts and lives of the congregation? If the only time

congregants see their pastors engage in kingdom-work is on the weekend during a service, will they ever make the connection between worship and mission? While I do not have the space to probe these questions further, often, leaders create culture, so congregants will follow their pastor's example. It will serve the Church well for future thinkers to address these questions and consider how they relate to the connection between corporate worship and the mission of God.

Other questions remain, like what are the best ways to reach seekers in a worship gathering in our current cultural moment? What are new generations looking for when they attend church services? If pastors persist in considering and answering these questions, then the Church will continue to answer Jesus' call to make disciples and partner with Him for the sake of His kingdom and mission in the world.

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