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LOOKING AHEAD: MY PENTECOSTAL LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION

I was raised on stories of the Azusa Street Revival. When my grandmother was a young girl, she met numerous people who were eyewitnesses to that outpouring and never stopped talking about the glory that God poured out at 312 Azusa Street. Flames could be seen leaping from the roof, and a cloud of glory filled the room. Sins were washed away, the sick were healed, demons were driven out, and massive groups of people were baptized with the Holy Ghost.

Growing up in what we called old-time Pentecost, I heard stories like those on a regular basis and saw God work in mighty ways. A centerpiece of that narrative, however, was that there was no order and no structure in those old-time meetings. Many of those who told the stories seemed to sincerely believe that any kind of organization is the enemy of Pentecost. When I began preaching the Gospel at age seventeen, I longed to see God do such mighty things, and I committed myself to seeing this old-time power manifested to a new generation.

The Real Azusa

Although I have no criticism to offer regarding those who gave me a thirst for the Spirit's outpouring, I have since learned that their view of the Azusa Street Revival was skewed. In *The Azusa St Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement*, Cecil M. Robeck Jr. writes, "While the mission valued and celebrated spontaneity, every service also included the

predictable... There were public prayers, singing, testimonies, preaching or teaching from the Bible, and time spent around the altar or in one of the upstairs rooms in personal prayer.”¹

Furthermore, the revival did not suddenly become an international sign and wonder as soon as a small group of people learned to value prayer and fasting, as I was previously led to believe. Frank Bartleman, a key figure in that revival, left behind a valuable chronicle of the Los Angeles outpouring. In *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles: the Original, Unabridged Azusa Street Story as Told by an Eyewitness*, Bartleman writes, “The present Pentecostal manifestation did not break out in a moment, like a huge prairie fire, and set the world on fire. In fact, no work of God ever appears that way.”²

I am more convinced now than ever that the twenty-first century world needs an Azusa-like outpouring. I am equally convinced that it will again require both spontaneity and consistent intentionality. It will demand the mobilization of resilient disciples by leaders who are unafraid to risk everything for the Gospel. As my eleven-year-old son, Josiah, once prophesied in church, “One little fire can light a thousand other little fires, and together, they will become a mighty blaze!”

Link Church

This week I stepped into a new role with Link Church. After serving as a campus pastor for four years, our leadership and I agreed that it would be beneficial to our three campuses for me to strategically focus on discipleship and leadership mobilization. Link Church envisions a Pentecostal outpouring overtaking the Arkansas River Valley that will impact the nations of the

¹ Cecil M. Robeck. *The Azusa St. Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Emanate Books, 2006), 136.

² Frank Bartleman. *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles: the Original, Unabridged Azusa Street Story as Told by an Eyewitness*. (Pensacola, Florida: Christian Life Books, 2014), 79.

world. Clarksville, Arkansas is home to our primary Link Church location. In Clarksville alone, there are students from twenty nations enrolled in the local University this year, as well as a large group of Karen refugees and immigrants from Mexico. We believe that we are positioned as never before to make a global impact, and we value the vision of Azusa as explained by Robeck. “If Pastor William J. Seymour and the people of the Azusa Street Mission wanted to spread the message of salvation, holiness, and spiritual empowerment across North America, they wanted even more to carry it around the world.”³

This paper lays out an overview of how I will move forward with this vision in my role as Discipleship Pastor. Part I focuses on developing resilient disciples at Link Church through Bible engagement, spiritual fervor, and relational connections. Part II lays out a vision to mobilize resilient disciples for incarnational ministry by establishing Spirit-led community, empowering economic transformation, and celebrating cultural diversity.

On the last night of our youth camp two months ago, the cloud of God’s presence that I heard stories about as a child visibly appeared under the tabernacle. Sins were washed away, demons were driven out, and numerous people were baptized in the Spirit. As Azusa once infused a vision for global evangelization into the DNA of the young Pentecostal movement, the great-grandchildren of Azusa must now manifest what has been handed down to us. As we raise up resilient disciples, mobilizing them to transform our communities, we must not lose sight of the cloud. We must not remain inside the upper room. Rather, as the day of Pentecost disciples brought the message of Christ to those gathered “from every nation under heaven,”⁴ we must bring the message to the more than twenty ethnic groups that dwell within our immediate reach.

³ Robeck, 235.

⁴ Acts 2:5. All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard version of the Bible.

PART I: DEVELOPING RESILIENT DISCIPLES AT LINK CHURCH

Resilient Disciples Love the Bible

Discipleship Crisis in the Twenty-First Century

Western Christianity is facing a discipleship crisis. Volumes of material are written to instruct leaders on how to effectively attract, hold, and mobilize crowds. Tragically, even churches that boast considerable numbers of attendees are now facing a situation where an individual's consistent presence in the pew does not necessarily indicate anything about that person's belief system. In their book, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*, David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock offer much insight into the lives of resilient disciples when compared to other churchgoers. They note, "...only about half of habitual churchgoers—young adults who attend church with regularity—strongly agree with straightforward statements about Jesus."⁵

Lack of Biblical knowledge is not without consequences. On the contrary, there is a direct correlation between the level of Bible engagement in believers' lives and the moral standards of those same individuals. In 2019 the Assemblies of God commissioned a study in partnership with the Barna Group called, *Built on the Bible: A Barna Study on Bible Engagement*. The "Bilingual Summary" of this report offers troubling insights. The "unengaged" are churchgoers who "Interact with the Bible infrequently, if at all. The Bible has minimal

⁵ David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock. *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2019), 43.

impact on their lives.”⁶ The study concludes that the “unengaged” are “61% more likely to view pornography,” “68% more likely to have sex outside of marriage,” and “74% more likely to” gamble.”⁷ These numbers suggest that the moral decline that is devastating our culture is directly connected to the Biblical ignorance that exists in our churches. Dr. Charlie Self makes a similar observation in his book, *Flourishing Churches and Communities: A Pentecostal Primer on Faith, Work, and Economics for Spirit-Empowered Discipleship*. Self writes, “When the Lord God is not exclusively worshiped and obeyed, changes in ethical behavior are not far behind.”⁸

Developing Resilient Disciples Through Bible Engagement

Kinnaman and Matlock define resilient disciples as followers of Jesus “who are resiliently faithful in the face of cultural coercion and who live a vibrant life in the Spirit.”⁹ According to their research of believers between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine, “there is a countercultural 10 percent of young Christians whose faith is vibrant and robust...this amounts to just under four million...in the US who follow Jesus and are resiliently faithful.”¹⁰

While *Faith for Exiles* focuses specifically on young adults, anecdotal evidence where I live as well as numbers from the *Built on the Bible* report suggests that the crisis of resiliency among Christ-followers is not limited to a single age group. As Discipleship Pastor my initial focus is on promoting Bible engagement among our faithful attendees, with the hope of creating

⁶ Barna Group. *Built on the Bible: A Barna Study on Bible Engagement*, “Bilingual Summary”. (Downloaded from www.bibleengagementproject.com/barna on August 8, 2022), 9.

⁷ Barna. “Bilingual Summary,” 25-26.

⁸ Charlie Self. *Flourishing Churches and Communities: A Pentecostal Primer on Faith, Work, and Economics for Spirit-Empowered Discipleship*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Library Press, 2013), 20.

⁹ Kinnaman and Matlock, 30.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 32.

a culture of love for Scripture that will overflow to all those impacted by our church. Although this may sound simplistic, *Built on the Bible* suggests that it is a powerful step toward the implementation of whole-person discipleship. People with high levels of bible engagement are 228% more likely to share their faith with others, three times as likely to volunteer at church, 231% more likely to disciple others, and 52% more likely to experience peace and joy in their daily lives.¹¹ Part II will expound on this at length, but there is also evidence of a direct correlation between personal Bible engagement and effectiveness at work.¹² The report's concluding observation is explicit, "It is strategic and urgent to focus on Bible engagement as one of the top priorities in making resilient disciples."¹³

When the apostles were faced with the need to reevaluate the effectiveness of their meal program for widows, they recognized the risk of allowing good things to distract them from the best things. They said, "we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). This priority must be established among leaders to be accepted by those who follow. Our Link Church leadership team has chosen to prioritize the Word in our own lives and to establish its primacy throughout the church.

Beginning this September, we will begin a journey throughout the story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. This priority will be emphasized from preschoolers to elders through children's church and small group meetings. Additionally, a priority of my position will be the development of in-depth personal studies that will be distributed electronically to function as a

¹¹ Barna, Bilingual Summary, 25-26.

¹² Barna Group. *Built on the Bible: A Barna Study on Bible Engagement*. (Downloaded from [www.bibleengagementproject.com/barna on August 8](http://www.bibleengagementproject.com/barna_on_August_8), 2022), 6.

¹³ Ibid, 27.

counterpart to our Sunday morning messages. These studies will utilize the key points from our Lead Pastor's sermons while giving opportunity for personal Scripture engagement.

Link Church will develop a culture of Bible engagement through practical implementation and public celebration. We will regularly share stories of lives transformed through love for the Word of God. We will celebrate families who model this value in their homes and share stories of local business owners whose endeavors prosper through the steady application of principles learned from the Word.

Resilient Disciples Model Spiritual Fervency

A concerning revelation of the *Built on the Bible* report is that Pentecostals are not more likely than other Christians to model consistent Bible engagement or to reflect the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.¹⁴ However, seventy-one percent of Assemblies of God attendees who were surveyed spoke in tongues, compared to only fifteen percent of the national baseline.¹⁵ The manifestation of the Holy Spirit's gifts in individual lives is a catalyst for growth among Spirit-filled churches. Pentecostals champion an experiential theology. In *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*, Wolfgang Vondey asserts that "Pentecostal theology is an invitation to the altar, and the altar is an invitation to the full gospel and the full gospel is an invitation to Pentecost."¹⁶ Stated another way, when Pentecostals understand the Word, they readily recognize that they can potentially experience the things they are learning. Numbers bear out this reality, as those with a

¹⁴ Ibid, 18, 20.

¹⁵ Ibid, 21.

¹⁶ Wolfgang Vondey. *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*. (New York, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 5.

high degree of Bible engagement are significantly more likely to speak in tongues. In fact, only six percent of those with low Bible engagement speak in tongues.¹⁷

Faith for Exiles notes that a mark of resilient discipleship is experiencing “intimacy with Jesus.”¹⁸ Eighty to ninety percent of those identified as resilient disciples affirmed the following statements: “My relationship with Jesus brings me deep joy and satisfaction,” “Jesus speaks to me in a way that is relevant to my life,” and “Worship is a lifestyle, not just an event.”¹⁹ Spiritual fervency and experiencing intimacy with Jesus are synonymous. Pentecostals are specially positioned to facilitate this experience, as their theology of the altar is an invitation to Pentecost itself.²⁰ Pentecostal services should naturally result in increased fervency through supernatural manifestations. Vondey notes, “There is no premeditated response to the day of Pentecost.”²¹ I agree with Vondey’s analysis. However, it can be reasonably predicted that Pentecost will lead individuals into a deeper encounter with Jesus. When speaking about the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14).

Dr. Henry Cloud, in his book *Boundaries for Leaders: Why Some People Get Results and Others Don’t*, asserts that healthy organizations are “predictable and shapeable.”²² That is, specific practices lead to specific outcomes. If we are not getting the outcomes we desire, we

¹⁷ Barna, *Built on the Bible*, 5.

¹⁸ Kinnaman and Matlock, 34.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 36.

²⁰ Vondey, 5.

²¹ *Ibid*, 14.

²² Henry Cloud. *Boundaries for Leaders: Why Some People Get Results and Others Don’t*. (New York, New York: Harper Business, 2013), 168.

must re-evaluate our practices.²³ Following Cloud’s logic, if almost all resilient disciples are spiritually fervent individuals, promoting spiritual fervency must be a top priority for faith leaders who wish to develop resilient disciples.

In my role as Discipleship Pastor, I will strive to help our leadership team promote an atmosphere that is conducive to growing in spiritual fervency. This will be approached in two ways. First, I will continually influence my fellow staff members to model experiencing intimacy with Christ. Dr. Carolyn Tennant agrees that this must be a priority for leaders. In her book *Catch the Wind of the Spirit: How the 5 Ministry Gifts Can Transform Your Church*, Tennant observes “...it’s impossible to lead someone where we haven’t been when it relates to spiritual things. Teachers in the church need to have been a disciple taught by the Spirit of God, have an intimate and ongoing relationship with Jesus, and personally know the power of life transformation.”²⁴ Our Link Church leaders must all model lives of worship and lead the way in experiencing Holy Spirit encounters. Second, all discipleship efforts will be designed with a “theology of the altar”²⁵ in view. Bible studies, worship services, and small group meetings will all be crafted to continually encourage encounters with Christ that will lead to enhanced spiritual fervency. A culture of fervency is already championed by Link Church’s leadership, so incorporating this culture into every aspect of discipleship will come naturally.

Resilient Disciples Prioritize Relational Connections

Several years ago, my wife received an unexpected call from an old friend. They had not spoken in a few years, and she felt incredibly encouraged that this person had chosen to reach

²³ Ibid, 168.

²⁴ Carolyn Tennant. *Catch the Wind of the Spirit: How the 5 Ministry Gifts Can Transform Your Church*. (Springfield, MO: Vital Resources, 2016), 72.

²⁵ Vondey, 5.

out. After they had talked for a while, the individual finally got around to her actual reason for reaching out—she was in a new network marketing endeavor. When my wife realized that there was an agenda behind her reaching out, the feeling of encouragement vanished. No one wants to feel like others are only interested in what may be gained through connecting. Genuine relational connections are a central need of humanity. God acknowledges this in the first pages of Scripture with the words, “It is not good that the man should be alone...” (Genesis 2:18).

Relational connections with other Christ-followers are essential to the development of resilient disciples. Kinnaman and Matlock’s research agrees with my assessment. They found that eighty-eight percent of resilient disciples affirmed, “The church is a place where I belong.”²⁶ Eighty-five percent said, “There is someone in my life who encourages me to grow spiritually.”²⁷

Jimmie began attending Link Church two years ago and soon surrendered his life to Christ. A year and a half later, a man named Peter also began attending. Jimmie reached out to encourage him, and the two of them soon connected, along with their wives and children. When Peter first came to church, he and his wife were struggling in their relationship. I shared a book with them that helped identify areas where they both needed growth. It profoundly impacted them. A few months later, Jimmie and his wife were facing similar difficulties. Although Jimmie did not choose to talk to any of our leaders, he did reach out to Peter, who shared how the book transformed his marriage. God used this relational connection to encourage Peter in his faith, and He later used the same connection to help Jimmie with his marriage.

Link Church has long recognized the vital role that relationships play in spiritual development. When our leadership first communicated this priority nearly a decade ago, the

²⁶ Kinnaman and Matlock, 36.

²⁷ Ibid, 36.

result was an exponential increase in effectiveness among Millennials. Four years ago, we transformed Sunday night services into a time for relational discipleship groups to meet. This dramatically increased Link Church's Sunday night engagement and became a catalyst for growth. While we are currently identifying ways to enhance the effectiveness of Link Group meetings, our leadership is unwavering in the call to form strong relational connections.

Increased spiritual fervency flows directly out of enhanced Bible engagement, and spiritual fervency naturally gives way to healthy relational connections. Self notes, "Being filled with the Spirit means enthusiasm for witness and overflowing love for all people."²⁸ The love that is too often missing from relationships is naturally produced by the Spirit's presence. Self continues, "In the book of Acts we see the new community learning to live together in faith, hope, and love as they are transformed by the teachings of Jesus and the apostles."²⁹ Bible engagement, spiritual fervency, and relational connections form a discipleship triad that must not be compromised. If any are missing, the discipleship process will suffer. In my current and future ministry, I will prioritize this discipleship triad, recognizing that not everyone begins in the same place. In some cases, friendship with another believer is what leads people to an altar encounter, resulting in increased interest in Scripture. In other circumstances, personal Bible study prompts an encounter with God, creating opportunities to fellowship with other believers. Although the order may not always be consistent, these experiences should always hold a place of priority in the discipleship process.

Although personal relationship with Christ is indeed important, the personal aspect of discipleship is sometimes overemphasized to the exclusion of valuing community. In *The*

²⁸ Self, *Flourishing Churches*, 35.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 35.

Beautiful Community: Unity, Diversity, and the Church, Irwyn L. Ince Jr. observes, “The fall destroyed union and unity with God and each other. Reunion is the story of Scripture.”³⁰ The decision to form meaningful relational connections is not only important for spiritual growth, but also an important sign of what has already happened internally.

The value of relational connections is far greater than mere friendship. It has the power to be deeply transformational. *Lessons from the Least of These* by Robert Woodson offers substantial guidance for all who wish to transform communities. He explains the power of personal resilience and relationships. “Men and women who had virtually lost their lives to drugs and alcohol have emerged as responsible employees, spouses, and parents. Fatherless youth who were raised on the streets and were drawn to the lures of gang violence and drug trafficking have become agents of peace and renewal in their communities.”³¹ This is a powerful testimony, but he does not stop there. Woodson posits that such personal resiliency can be released into a community when healthy relationships are intentionally formed. He believes that these “...grassroots leaders are antibodies. They are indigenous to the body, to the community. They are closest to the source of the disease. Therefore, if you strengthen the body’s immune system, the body will heal itself and be resistant to future disease.”³² This is deeply instructive. Personal resiliency is contagious and can become an agent of community healing. Part II of this paper will further explore this concept. When the church empowers disciples to develop personal resilience and then mobilizes those disciples for incarnational ministry, the possibilities are endless.

³⁰ Irwyn L. Ince Jr. *The Beautiful Community: Unity, Diversity, and the Church at its Best*. (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: IVP, InterVarsity Press, 2020), 98.

³¹ Robert L. Woodson, Sr. *Lessons From the Least of These*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Post Hill Press, 2020), 47.

³² *Ibid*, 44.

PART II: MOBILIZING RESILIENT DISCIPLES FOR INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY

Mobilized Disciples Establish Spirit-Led Community

Spirit-led community is the natural product of healthy relational connections among believers. I envision a community of believers at Link Church becoming a vessel through which the healing that Woodson wrote about takes place. As these believers grow together as resilient disciples, they will be mobilized to live out their faith within the communities where our Link campuses are located.

We rejoice when God calls someone into what is often termed vocational ministry. However, the most effective work will be done among those whose vocation leads them to be immersed within the community through work, school, or involvement with community organizations or non-profits. Our discipleship process will focus on mobilizing resilient disciples for action in their own communities. Woodson illustrates the power of this approach. “When you assemble resilient neighborhood healers...and support their individual and collective needs, the seeds of a grassroots movement are planted, which can transform an entire community.”³³ He further explains, “People who are surviving and thriving closest to the problem have the best chance of designing effective, long-term solutions.”³⁴ Old Testament wisdom affirms that communities can be transformed through changed hearts. “When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan” (Proverbs 29:2). The expansion of Christ’s kingdom in our community will bless the community in ways that no one yet envisions.

³³ Woodson, 45.

³⁴ Ibid, 46.

A Spirit-Led Community for the Local Community

Discipleship processes often focus on mobilizing new volunteers within the church. One of the most effective ways to meet this need is to simply help disciples fall in love with the Bible. Barna found that fifty-five percent of people with a high level of Bible engagement had volunteered in their local church within the last seven days. By comparison, only twenty-one percent of those with low Bible engagement had done so.³⁵ The most powerful thing a local church can do to mobilize volunteers is to simply teach the Bible.

Our discipleship process at Link Church will place a heavier focus on mobilizing volunteers within the community. We believe that our Spirit-led community has the power to transform our local community, but to do so we must be deeply entrenched within it. Tara Beth Leach, in her book *Radiant Church: Restoring the Credibility of our Witness*, writes that “God’s people are called to live in such a way that the world is blessed through us—through our actions, our life together, and our love.”³⁶

I vividly remember the day I was sitting at my desk when a social worker walked in. He said, “Pastor, you do not know me, but I have a situation and as I was praying, I sensed that you would care.” He explained that a family in our community was at risk of losing their children. Although they were not directly abusing them, generational poverty had left these parents without the tools to provide a safe and sanitary environment for young kids. I asked what he was requesting. He said, “Pastor, in one week I will return to remove their children from the home, but I do not want to. If you are willing to teach them, I believe it would make a difference.

³⁵ Barna, *Built on the Bible*, 9.

³⁶ Tara Beth Leach. *Radiant Church: Restoring the Credibility of Our Witness*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 95.

Words cannot explain how uncomfortable that first visit was. I came directly from church and was wearing a suit. In retrospect, I realize this was a lack of wisdom. I looked down at the filth on their porch and asked, “May I sit down?” As soon as I sat on the porch, effectively ruining my suit, the mother’s whole demeanor changed. I said, “Ma’am I am not here to judge you. I am here to help. Please let us help you.” She agreed, and the next day we brought a team of people. We killed roaches, brought lice treatment, cleaned surfaces until fingers bled, and she worked right alongside us. I have never seen a more grateful individual.

My wife came from deep poverty. Before we went, she told me, “We cannot solve these people’s problems with money. If we do, they will always believe there was nothing they could have done, and they will feel embarrassed that we helped them.” Following her counsel, we found solutions that were affordable, and by God’s grace, she was able to keep her children. Although her husband was never converted to my knowledge, the mom and her kids later gave their lives to Christ. If the Spirit-led community will go to their local community that has been wrecked by brokenness, healing and miracles will happen. As Leach explains, “we—the church—are to display a better way of living, a fresh way of living, a stunning way of living, and a radiant way of living to a weary and broken world.”³⁷

Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn’t the American Dream was written by Brian Fikkert and Kelly M. Kopic. The authors offer a painful rebuke, “...the unstated assumption behind most of our poverty alleviation efforts is that the goal is to make poor people just like us.” Real transformation only happens when we remember that the goal is to make all people like Christ who said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). The family we helped needed someone to enter their home without judging them

³⁷ Leach, 95.

and show them a better way. Our local communities desperately need resilient disciples mobilized among them so that miracles like this can happen.

Mobilized Disciples Empower Economic Transformation

As resilient disciples take their rightful place in the local community, the local economy will naturally be transformed. Among those surveyed by Barna who had a high level of Bible engagement, eighty-seven percent said, “When I’m at work, it’s important to me that I do excellent work in order to bring glory to God.”³⁸ By contrast, only thirty percent of those with a low level of Bible engagement felt the same way.³⁹ Holistic discipleship transforms people’s attitudes toward work. An Azusa-level awakening that produces such resilient disciples would transform the local economy almost overnight.

In their ground-breaking book on discipleship, *Life in 5-D: A New Vision of Wholeness*, authors Charlie Self, Johan Mostert, and Jame Bolds shed light on why resilient disciples impact the economy. “For Christians, workplace ethics are more than rule-keeping and basic honesty. They go deeper into our motives for our work, our attitudes toward co-workers, and our refusal to ‘play the games’ like the political and power-hungry colleagues that often plague our workspaces.”⁴⁰ Fikkert and Kopic agree. They write, “...work isn’t a necessary evil that we have to endure to make a living.”⁴¹ As the process of discipleship changes the attitudes of disciples, they in turn, revolutionize the local economy by introducing a Biblical ethic into the workplace.

³⁸ Barna, *Built on the Bible*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

⁴⁰ Charlie Self, Johan Mostert, and Jame Bolds. *Life in 5-D: A New Vision of Wholeness*. (Indaba Publications, 2022), Draft Version., 68.

⁴¹ Fikkert and Kopic, 155.

In the year 2012, I served as lead pastor of a local church with a crippling mortgage. Although they were able to make the payments on their \$120,000 debt, very little money remained to devote to ministry. As I prayed for God's intervention, He moved me to do two things. First, I developed a habit of praying for God to release lavish blessings on our local business owners who already modeled lives of generosity. Second, I visited local businesses and asked if I could pray for their owners. As unusual as this approach may sound, it worked. The church was debt free in less than a year, and we did not ask anyone for an extra penny. Furthermore, the response of local business owners was overwhelming. Those times of prayer formed relationships that were personally meaningful, and God used them to bless the church and community in ways I never envisioned.

What if true revival in our local churches supplied the answer to the prayers of local business owners? What if the church valued those business owners for their contribution to the local economy instead of waiting to value them if they donate to the church? What if unemployment in our communities became a thing of the past because revival came to our churches? I am not certain these questions are being asked in many places, but I am absolutely convinced that they need to be asked. The church will never receive love offerings large enough to eliminate poverty and homelessness from our city streets. However, when resilient disciples develop a vision for community revitalization and accept their role in transforming the local economy, anything is possible.

When church leaders begin talking like this, there are always more than enough Pentecostals available to accuse them of preaching a social Gospel. Perhaps it is time someone responds like Jesus by answering these accusations with a question. Is the Gospel not supposed to transform society? Leach is clear in her vision of Gospel impact. "We participate in the life of

Christ when we feed the hungry, visit the incarcerated, welcome the immigrant and orphan, give generously, welcome our neighbors to our table, work to dismantle systems of oppression, and serve our community.”⁴² If Jesus is our King, then it is only reasonable that our local communities should be blessed as He reigns within the Spirit-led community.⁴³ Perhaps then the truth of Proverbs 29:2 will be evident to all, “When the righteous increase, the people rejoice...”

Mobilized Disciples Celebrate Cultural Diversity

When the Spirit-led community becomes fully incarnate in the local community and has a transformational effect on the local economy, it paves the way to make a truly global impact. As the discipleship model of Link Church is fully incorporated, I anticipate the mobilization of local church missionaries into our community on a historic scale. We will prepare for global impact by celebrating cultural diversity.

In *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer: Christology in Light of Pentecost*, Frank Macchia reveals why fully formed, Spirit-filled disciples should prepare for maximum impact.

Because the Messiah bears and imparts the cosmic and eschatological Spirit, no nationalism can contain this Messiah without betraying him. No nationalism can seek to domesticate the will of the Creator in pouring forth the divine favor through the Messiah to all nations, for that would quench the Spirit.⁴⁴

Conservative Christians have many virtues, but being truly loving and welcoming to people from other cultures is often absent among those virtues. In the introduction of this paper, I noted that people from more than twenty nations currently reside within reach of Link Church. If

⁴² Leach, 87.

⁴³ Ibid, 78-84.

⁴⁴ Frank Macchia. *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer: Christology in Light of Pentecost*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 197.

those in our congregation choose to truly celebrate cultural diversity, the opportunity for an awakening after the pattern of the day of Pentecost lies at our doorstep.

In *Life in 5-D*, the authors note that “in the Awakenings of the 18th and early 19th centuries, leaders integrated the call for conversions and spiritual renewal with causes for community and national transformation.”⁴⁵ In the twenty-first century, a key area where community and national transformation are needed is in the attitude of many conservatives toward other cultures.⁴⁶ Resilient disciples must recognize the work that Christ is doing among the nations and refuse to “quench the Spirit.”⁴⁷

Countless millions of dollars have been rightly spent sending missionaries to the nations of the world. Churches need to continue this investment. However, it is also imperative that churches acknowledge that the nations have now come to us. The nations are here, in a place where it is not assumed that we must already know their culture or language when we build relationships. Resilient disciples at Link Church must be quickly mobilized to celebrate and learn about the varying ethnic groups that are living among us. We can celebrate cultural diversity by trying new foods, learning new customs, and welcoming new friends.

Link Church recently commissioned a husband-and-wife team as campus missionaries to the University of the Ozarks with the expressed mission to reach international students. Funding this mission is an important step, but it must be paired with a culture of love rather than suspicion among our members. We will welcome students to our holiday celebrations, provide transportation and groceries when needed, and open our homes while many of them are away

⁴⁵ Self, Mostert, and Bolds, 63.

⁴⁶ This is not intended as an attack on all conservatives. I identify as a social conservative and vote as such. It is what I perceive to be a needed call to repentance.

⁴⁷ Macchia, 197.

from family. It is my prayer that the overflow of economic blessings that comes from mobilizing the Spirit-led community will meet needs for some of these students that might otherwise go unmet. As relationships are built for God's glory and as people from many nations come to Christ, the church must maximize its impact by equipping these new disciples from foreign lands to evangelize those from their own culture.

These words from the Azusa Street Revival strike me as deeply today as the first time I read them:

The color line was washed away through the blood of Jesus Christ...Men and women went from Azusa Street empowered to witness...The urgency of the hour was so strong that all notions of denominational structures or religious institutions were swept away in an urgency to complete the Great Commission in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ.⁴⁸

There is a desperate need for God to once again wash away the artificial barriers that divide His people through the blood of Jesus Christ. Ince beautifully sums up this call for disciples to celebrate cultural diversity. He first cautions, "Egypt relegated the people of Israel to slavery just because they were not Egyptian."⁴⁹ He then offers a powerful reminder, "...humanity's diversity is rooted in God's creative genius and humanity's destiny is to live in the reality of unity in diversity with Jesus Christ as the king to whom we joyfully bow."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Robeck, 8.

⁴⁹ Ince, 43.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 56.

CONCLUSION

The cloud of God's glory that showed up at youth camp in June impacted children and elders alike. As I stood on the platform, there was a moment when people were praising God with such intensity that it was difficult to imagine how the sound of heaven could be more beautiful. In that moment, pillars of what looked like smoke rose in bursts directly from the floor. There seems to be a common tendency to either build a monument to such experiences or to reject them as religious hysteria. I am reminded, however, of a cloud in the Bible that appeared to lead the Israelites from Egypt to the land of promise (Exodus 13:21). The cloud appeared to remind them that God was leading them to the place of their calling. If they had chosen to remain where the cloud first appeared, they might have lived the rest of their lives and never saw it again.

In the same way, the cloud reminds us now that God is still calling His people forward. The task of world evangelization is not yet complete. Like the disciples at 312 Azusa Street who seemed to live in the glory for a time, we must remember that God is calling us to model a different way of living. He is calling us to resiliency, to an unstoppable life of faith that will refuse to quit no matter what obstacles we face. He is calling us to love the Scriptures, to be fervent in the Spirit, and to value Godly relationships. As resilient disciples, He is calling us to develop Spirit-led community, to empower economic transformation, and to celebrate cultural diversity. He is calling leaders to model a life of discipleship, remembering that we too are followers of Jesus Christ.

Leonard Sweet said it best in his book, *I Am a Follower: the Way, the Truth, and Life of Following Jesus*.

This is the great tragedy of the church in the last fifty years. We have changed Paul's words, 'Follow me as I follow Christ,' to 'Follow me as I lead for Christ.' Over and over we hear, 'What the church needs is more and better leaders,' or 'Training leaders is job one.' Really? Jesus said, 'Go and make disciples.' We stopped and built worship warehouses. Jesus said, 'Follow me.' We heard, 'Be a leader.'⁵¹

This rebuke offers a fitting conclusion. Sweet is not disparaging the role of leaders. He is reminding us that before we are anything else, we too are followers of Christ. As Christ-followers, we must choose to follow the cloud of God's presence wherever it may lead us, for as long as we are following His presence, we will find ourselves transformed continually into His image. This is the true definition of discipleship—to be like Christ.

⁵¹ Leonard Sweet. *I Am a Follower: the Way, the Truth, and Life of Following Jesus*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), Kindle e-book, location 510.

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