
Ridder Church Renewal

**A Brief Introduction
to the Core Content**

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The following text is adapted from articles about Ridder Church Renewal written by RCA pastor Scott Stephan. The articles first appeared in the September 7, 2014, edition of the Sunday School Guide. They are adapted and republished here with permission.

My name is Scott Stephan and I have served as the pastor of Second Reformed Church in Fulton, Illinois, for nine years. My wife's name is Karen, and I have two children, a high-school-age daughter named Sarah and a junior-high-school-age son named Sam. Several years ago, Second Reformed Church was invited to participate in the Ridder Church Renewal training that was being spearheaded by Journey, the continuing education branch of Western Theological Seminary, in cooperation with Jim Herrington (co-author of *Leading Congregational Change*) and Trisha Taylor (co-author of *The Leader's Journey*, along with Jim Herrington and Robert Creech).

The Ridder Church Renewal process is one of the primary processes by which the RCA revitalizes churches and transforms leaders. The purpose of this material is to expose churches to an overview of that content and to provide opportunities for church groups to discuss the content.

Ridder Church Renewal is now on its third cycle of inviting leadership teams and pastors into this training. The program is named for former seminary president Herman Ridder and his wife, Lenora. It is rapidly becoming one of the primary means by which the Reformed Church in America is revitalizing churches, mobilizing leaders, and raising disciples.

I would like to offer a window into the core content of Ridder Church Renewal. My purposes are three-fold: 1) writing about this content will catalyze my learning; 2) I believe this content can spur some transformative discussion in a small group or Sunday school setting; 3) this may help guide the decision of churches/pastors who are considering participating in Ridder Church Renewal.

The Undergirding Convictions of Ridder Church Renewal

Before diving into the concepts of Ridder Church Renewal, here are several convictions that undergird the entire training. These convictions are all interrelated. After each conviction you will be invited to respond to a related question.

Conviction 1: *Personal transformation precedes corporate transformation.*

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

We want transformed, vibrant, vital churches. The process of transformation, however, must begin with me and you. The means by which a congregation is transformed is when the pastor is transformed, and the staff is transformed, and the elders are transformed, and the deacons are transformed, and the small group leaders are transformed, and the janitor is transformed. Transformation begins with me.

We are masters in identifying what someone else (“they”) should do to change and to grow. We are novices in the practices that lead to our own transformation. That’s a recipe for frustration and hypocrisy.

Question for reflection: In one year, how would you like to grow in your faith journey?

Conviction 2: *Spiritual maturity and emotional maturity cannot be separated.*
“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24)

We can’t be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature. Spiritual maturity is not simply about how many verses we have memorized or how consistent our morning devotion is. Spiritual maturity also entails how we process our anger, how we deal with conflict in relationships, how we manage anxiety, how we live out of the wounds of our past, or how we do (or don’t) keep our word.

Because growing in spiritual maturity means growing in emotional maturity, we can expect the process to be a little messy. When we join the psalmist in asking God to search us and test us, we can expect that God will expose some of the weeds in the garden of our makeup. Messy is good, as long as it leads to change and growth. There is no shame in working through the mess of growing in spiritual and emotional maturity.

Questions for reflection: What impact does shame have on you when God exposes some of the messes in your life? How does Romans 8:1 counter that shame?

Conviction 3: *Learning happens best through a process of acquiring information, practice, and reflection.*

“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Mark 1:17, ESV)

Jesus did not have a classroom with 12 desks arranged in neat, orderly rows for his disciples to sit and take notes as he lectured. Rather, he called the disciples to follow him.

Their process of learning was very hands-on.

In most churches, however, we have settled for a model of learning that revolves around acquiring information, acquiring more information, and acquiring yet more information. Our assumption is that the only thing keeping us from growing is the information that we don't yet know. And so we go from sermon to sermon, Sunday school class to Sunday school class, small group to small group, Bible study to Bible study, piling on more and more information.

One of the fascinating things about Jesus' ministry was how soon he sent his disciples into the field to practice what they had been seeing and learning from him. In Mark 3, Jesus appointed the 12 disciples and in Mark 6 Jesus sent them out two by two.

The pastor and author Francis Chan uses an illustration of a football team to communicate this idea. Imagine a football team taking the field and huddling up. The coach signals the play and the quarterback explains to his teammates the play they are going to run. There's great excitement in the huddle, because this play has tremendous potential to produce a touchdown. The team breaks the huddle, but instead of running up to the line of scrimmage and executing the play, they run over to the sideline and call a time out. The coach sends them back on to the field with another play. Once again there's great enthusiasm for the play. Everyone knows what they're supposed to do, but the team repeatedly chooses the sideline over the scrimmage line. They never run the play.

This is a vivid picture of the dominant learning model for many of our churches. Acquiring information is good and necessary, but our growth must also be spurred on by practice and reflection.

Question for reflection: How might the way we do church change if we were to adopt the model of learning based on information, practice, and reflection?

Conviction 4: Transformation requires a posture of personal responsibility.

"[T]hough by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!...But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." (Hebrews 5:12-14, NIV)

One of the greatest gifts to me through Ridder Church Renewal was having a coach with whom I had a weekly coaching call to help me reflect on the information I was receiving and practicing. After several years of coaching, my coach informed me that he needed to end our coaching relationship, as he was being asked to take on greater responsibilities in other areas.

In the past my response would have been remarkably passive: "Gee, I hope someone offers to coach me again." A response driven by a posture of responsibility would sound something more like this: "Gee, coaching has been so beneficial for me that I am going to have to be proactive in finding another coach."

At some point the infant who is fed from a spoon in the hand of her mom or dad will learn to hold that spoon in her own hand. She will learn how to feed herself. There will come a time when it's no longer appropriate for mom or dad to make the sound of a buzzing airplane inviting their little sweetheart to open her mouth and swallow the blueberry buckle (my child's favorite). Similarly, as we grow, we need to learn to feed ourselves.

Questions for reflection: Can you think of one area where you have been passive in your own spiritual growth? What one thing will you commit to with your group members?

Conviction 5: *Transformation is a work of the Spirit.*

"I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I remain in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing." (John 15:5, NIV)

The key to our transformation is learning to abide in the vine. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit transforms us. At the heart of our transformation is an ever-growing relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through which he accomplishes his work in us.

Topic for reflection: As openly and honestly as you can, knowing that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, share with your group your current practices of staying connected with God.

The content that church leadership teams are exposed to in the Ridder Church Renewal process consists of one “end game,” four values, and five skill sets.

ONE “END GAME”—FOLLOWING CHRIST IN MISSION

Recently, at the church I serve, we adopted a slogan for our church: “Every Member a Minister; Every Ministry a Mission.” We are not the authors of that slogan, but it powerfully reflects the type of community we desire to become. We desire to be a church in which the priesthood of all believers is practiced as much as it is professed. We long to be an externally focused church that is in tune with the spiritual and physical needs of her community. We long and desire for these things...except when we don't.

There is a relentless gravitational pull that causes our focus to collapse upon itself. Instead of mission becoming the rally cry, survival becomes the rally cry. Instead of the needs of the lost governing decision making, self-interest rules the day. While we would never say it, we can look at the surrounding community as a means to a selfish end. They are potential customers who are needed to help prop us up, to help us survive.

With the steep decline in church attendance over the last few decades, the anxiety about survival is understandable. 90 percent of churches have fewer than 350 members. Most of those churches see that number getting smaller and smaller every year. The classis of which I am a member, Illinois Classis, is 27 percent smaller today than it was in 2000. Extend that trajectory a few more decades and you can begin to understand the impulse toward survival.

Somehow, we have mistranslated the word “go” into the word “come.” Jesus was clear on multiple occasions that the church is called to go into the world:

- *“All authority in heaven and on earth has*

been given to me; therefore, go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:18-19)

- *“As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” (John 20:21)*
- *“...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)*

The church has long accomplished this mission by inviting the community to come to her. Worship times were advertised on church signs and in the yellow pages, the doors to the church were opened, and the people came. In our small community of Fulton, Illinois, there were three Reformed churches, all within a couple blocks of one another, each with sanctuaries that could seat around 400 people. All three churches were full every Sunday. Today, it's a different story. One church building is for sale, as two of the churches have merged out of necessity. Sanctuaries are no longer full.

In light of this current reality, one common response is to find new, compelling and creative ways to say “come.” This strategy can be summarized as “attractional church,” and is based on the mental model of getting people to come to us so that we can reach them (and they can help us survive). The thought process here is, “They're no longer coming, so we need to do something differently to get them to come.” It's important to note that there is nothing inherently wrong with seeking to be an attractive church as long as the gospel is not compromised. If given the choice between being an attractive church or unattractive church, I would hope we would all choose the former. However, in our desire to welcome our community with an enthusiastic “Come!” it's easy to neglect Jesus' charge to us: “Go!”

Several churches that have been involved in the Ridder Church Renewal process have taken the initiative to meet with the mayor and other key leaders in their community to learn about the pressing needs of the community. Beautiful partnering relationships have emerged between schools, townships, and the church. In our community, four youth groups recently came together for a week, uniting to paint six houses of people in financial and physical need. There is tremendous buzz around town, both about the churches uniting and about the work being accomplished. In the midst of all the creative ways that the church is engaging her community, the most powerful and strategic means of engaging mission is, and always has been, for every member to take on the call to mission—the call to go.

Our mission and our life should be one integrated whole. Being missional is not something we do after we get home from work or when we show up to volunteer at the food pantry. Living on mission is a 24/7 proposition. Each church member has a circle of influence that nobody else in the church has. Those relationships extend to family members, neighbors, coworkers, friends, acquaintances, and strangers that we happen to cross paths with on a daily basis. A church of 200 members, in which every member identifies herself or himself as a minister charged to go, can easily have a circle of ministry that numbers in the thousands. If every member is a minister, then Sunday mornings become primarily about worshiping God and equipping members for the purpose of ministry.

Two years ago my family moved out of the church parsonage and into our own home. Not only did this move afford us the opportunity of home ownership but it has also created for us the opportunity of a new mission field. Now, instead of a mammoth church building as our only neighbor, we live on a block surrounded by neighbors. We have organized several block parties and continue to seek and pray for opportunities to love the people whom God has placed around us.

Ridder Church Renewal is, at its core, is about

equipping the church through personal and corporate transformation for the purpose of accomplishing Christ's mission in this world. The mission has never changed from that day Jesus looked in his disciples' eyes and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me; therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Questions for reflection:

1. React to the slogan "Every Member a Minister; Every Ministry a Mission." What do you like about it? What don't you like?
 2. For many churches, especially declining ones, the rally cry subtly shifts from "mission" to "survival." What are the differences you might expect in a church motivated by mission versus a church motivated by survival? How does this relate to your church?
 3. The church often complains that members enter into a relationship with her much like a customer would with a vendor of goods and services: "I'll stay until you no longer meet my needs and expectations, at which time I'll take my business elsewhere." How has the church contributed to this merchant/customer relationship? How might church change if members were co-owners rather than consumers?
 4. How does your church rely on the attractional model of ministry? In what ways is that model effective or ineffective?
 5. In what ways is your church engaged in mission, responding to Jesus' charge to go?
 6. Where do you see opportunities for mission in your life? If your life and mission were integrated into one whole, what would be different?
 7. Do you agree that the purpose of Sunday morning is primarily to worship God and equip the members for ministry? Explain why or why not.
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FOUR VALUES

The Value of Integrity

“Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’ Otherwise you will be condemned.”
(James 5:12, NIV)

The other night my 11-year-old son Samuel asked me what the word *integrity* meant. Integrity is one of the four key values in the Ridder Church Renewal process, and so Sam’s question provided a great opportunity to share some of my learning with him.

The first definition of integrity is probably the easiest to understand, even while it remains so difficult to practice. Integrity is doing what you say you are going to do, when you say you will do it, in the manner that it is meant to be done. There are three very clear parts to this definition:

Doing what you say you are going to do...

We often describe this as being a person of your word or, as James wrote, letting your yes be yes and your no be no. Just last night at a meeting I volunteered to call several people and invite them to participate in a project we are working on at church. In this matter, I will be exhibiting integrity when I follow through on calling these people, since I gave my word that I would. If I fail to call them, obviously I will be out of integrity.

...when you say you are going to do it...

I serve as an athletic booster for the local high school. Recently we organized a golf tournament and the boosters were invited to contact local businesses to sponsor a hole. I sat in a meeting two months ago and agreed to contact several businesses. I hate asking for money, and so this task became one that I continued to put off. A phone call from the athletic director finally compelled me to get into action. The businesses I talked to were all willing to sponsor a hole, but, because I delayed so long in calling, we didn’t have time to print signs with the businesses’

names on them before the tournament. I was out of integrity, because even though I made the contact, I didn’t do it in the timely manner that I said I would do it.

...in the manner that it is meant to be done.

One of my children’s most dreaded chores is cleaning their room. One Monday morning I got up and was looking for some pants for my son to wear to school, and I couldn’t find any. I knew he had plenty of pants, and so the search began. I found all of his pants jammed under his bed. When he had been cleaning his room, instead of throwing the clothes into the hamper he was pushing them under the bed. He may have “cleaned” the room but he failed to clean it with integrity because he did not clean it in the manner that it was meant to be done.

One of the most painful but beneficial aspects of Ridder Church Renewal for me has been this emphasis on integrity. God has gradually, and sometimes not so gradually, revealed areas in my life where there are gaps in my integrity. At one point I felt like I was swimming in integrity gaps everywhere I looked. It’s my suspicion that many of the various problems we face in ministry and in life can be traced to gaps in integrity.

One of the best theological words we use regarding integrity gaps is “mess.” Integrity gaps create messes. When I routinely show up at home a half-hour later than I tell my wife I will, I create a mess in our relationship that needs to be cleaned up. When I say that I’m going to make phone calls to raise money and don’t make them, I have multiple messes. I have a mess with the athletic director, who is trusting that those phone calls will be made, I have a mess with my

fellow boosters, who are counting on me to get my part of the job done, and in my case, I had a mess with the sponsors who, though they gave donations, didn't have their names advertised at the golf tournament because of my tardiness.

Through Ridder Church Renewal, we are taught how to clean up messes. Messes are inevitable, as we will never fully live in perfect integrity this side of heaven. So, when God alerts us to a gap in our integrity, how do we go about cleaning up that mess? Here is a four-step process that is extremely powerful and helpful.

1. We acknowledge our integrity gap.

There may be very legitimate reasons for our integrity gap, but this is not the time to present our defense. This is the time to specifically state how we failed to live into our word.

2. We invite the person with whom the integrity gap exists to share with us the impact of our failure to live with integrity.

I have found this is the hardest step, and yet the most reconciling step in cleaning up a mess. The truth is, we often don't want to know the impact of our integrity gap. We want someone to reply, "Don't worry about it—no big deal." The truth is also that the person we have offended may not want to be honest about the impact of our failure to keep our word. We have been conditioned to settle for relationships that are in a perpetual state of messiness because we are unwilling to have these painfully honest but necessary conversations.

3. We ask for forgiveness after getting in touch with the full impact of our integrity gap.

4. We re-promise. "Honey, when I tell you that I'm going to be home at 5:00 p.m., I'm going to do everything I can to be home at 5:00 p.m., and if I can't make it, I will call you in advance to let you know."

The first definition of integrity relates to those things about which we explicitly give our word. The second definition of integrity relates to those things where our word is implicitly given. For example, I am a father of two children and I know

that God has a certain design for fathers. God calls fathers to love their children, to discipline their children, to not exasperate their children, and to protect their children. As a Christian I am implicitly committing myself to living into this God-given design.

We have integrity when we live into our design. One of the easiest ways to understand this idea of integrity is to consider a bridge. The church I serve is several blocks from a bridge that crosses the mighty Mississippi. Every day thousands of cars trust the integrity of that bridge as they cross from Illinois to Iowa and from Iowa to Illinois. Theoretically, because the bridge is open for business, there is an implicit word being given that this bridge has integrity and that it will be able to accomplish what it was designed to do.

There is a design for us as disciples of Christ, as parents, as children, as spouses, as employees, as neighbors, and as athletic boosters. We have integrity when we live into that design, and we fail to have integrity when we don't live into that design.

Questions for reflection:

1. Reflect on the first definition: Integrity is doing what you say you are going to do, when you say you will do it, in the manner that it is meant to be done. Which part of that definition do you find the most difficult to practice?
2. Do you think God only wants us to give our word to the things that we know we can follow through on? If we never have any integrity gaps, how might that be a sign that we are living far too small of a life?
3. As you learned about integrity gaps, did God raise to the surface an awareness of any integrity gaps that currently exist in your life? Please share. (Kudos to anyone who is willing to give their word to the group that they will clean up that mess using the four-step process!)
4. If someone sinned against you and they came to you wanting to ask for forgiveness, how do you think you would react if they asked you to share with others the impact of what they had done? Why might this be a powerful, reconciling experience?
5. How do you think the act of cleaning up your messes will impact your ability and resolve to have integrity by keeping your word?

The Value of Authenticity

In Exodus 2 we learn that God heard the cry for help from the Israelites who were enslaved in Egypt. We're informed that he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We're told that God looked upon the Israelites and was concerned for them. He was about to insert himself into their situation and rescue them from captivity. There is great anticipation for what God is about to do. Nevertheless, there is something inside me that wants to ask, "Why now?" Or, to put an even sharper point on the question, "God, what have you been up to now?" Do you think we are allowed to ask God such questions?

The Israelites had been slaves for more than 400 years. Did God not hear their cries before? Had he forgotten his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Was he not concerned 100 years earlier...200 years earlier...or 300 years earlier? It's easy for us to rush from Exodus 2 to Exodus 3 without wrestling with these questions. It's easy for us to throw out a true but trite expression such as, "God is good all the time, and all the time God is good." What's hard is to struggle with relating to God when we don't understand God's ways.

Authenticity is one of the key values in Ridder Church Renewal, and living out this value begins in our relationship with God. God wants a relationship with the real you.

Authenticity with God demands that we express our thoughts and feelings with him. There is a time to ask the question, "Where have you been, God?" (There's a good chance that the answer will be, "Where have *you* been?") An authentic relationship with God demands that we tell him about our anger, our fears, our embarrassments, our sins, our lusts, and our loves.

There is a scene in the movie *Bruce Almighty* where Morgan Freeman (playing the role of God) asks Jim Carrey (playing the role of Bruce)

what he wants to pray for. Bruce, recognizing that he's talking to God, gives what he thinks is the "right" answer and says, "World peace." God frowns. "What do you really want to pray for?" Freeman asks. Finally Bruce gets authentic and prays for the girl he loves, and when he finishes Freeman responds, "Now that's a prayer."

We will not grow significantly in our spiritual maturity when we are acting a part. Honesty is non-negotiable in our relationship with God. In the content of Ridder Church Renewal, one phrase that is often used is "authenticity is the gateway to transformation." For some people, authenticity with God comes fairly easy. After all, he knows everything about us already. He already knows about the skeletons in the closet, so what's the big deal about opening the closet door and inviting him in? Better yet, God's really good at maintaining confidentiality. He's not going to tell our secrets to anyone, so we're safe with him.

A legitimate question that often gets asked is whether or not we have to be authentic in our relationships with one another. We understand the need to be authentic in our relationship with God, but is that really necessary in our relationships with one another? The answer provided in Ridder Church Renewal is that authenticity with God *and* with others is the gateway to transformation.

When Adam was naming all the animals in the garden, it was observed that there was no suitable helper for him. He was alone. God declared that it was not good for a man to be alone and so he created Eve. The opposite of being authentic in our relationships with one another is being alone in our relationships. If we are unwilling to reveal who we are, we cannot be known, and if we are not known we will find ourselves alone in a swarm of acquaintances and thin friendships. Like Adam, it is still not good for us to be alone.

Naturally, this stirs some resistance within us. The other day I sat in a diner and listened as a good friend wrestled with the invitation to attend a retreat. I had explained to him that he would be pushed in this retreat to be authentic, both with God and with the other participants in the retreat. My friend is a godly man and a good man. The thought of letting people into his inner world, however, was deeply troubling. "What's the point?" he asked. "I don't see any value in it."

Of course, it's not appropriate for us to get "naked"—metaphorically speaking—with everyone. There is a style of "in-your-face authenticity" that repels more than it attracts. It is normal and healthy for relationships to progress in trust and intimacy. At the same time, it is necessary for our health and for our spiritual development to have a few relationships where there is a high degree of authenticity. We were created to know and be known.

Several years ago I sat at a Ridder Church Renewal event and listened as the speaker said that we all need a few close relationships where there are no secrets. Internally, my stomach twisted as I listened. The speaker recognized how intimidated so many of us were with this level of authenticity, so she continued by saying that, at the very least, we should go to the edge of our comfort zone, and then go at least one step further. I'm so grateful for her challenge.

One of the greatest struggles I have had to wrestle with in my own growth as a Christian, and as a human being, is an inner sense of shame and condemnation that I live with. My secrets haunt me. I'm not a bad guy, and yet there are things that I don't want to be known about me.

The paradox, ironically, is that the antidote to shame and condemnation is not found in hiding in the shadows of secrecy. Shame and condemnation breed on secrecy like the gnats in my backyard breed on long, moist grass.

The antidote to shame is not secrecy but authenticity. In all the times that I have pushed myself to let someone past the border of my

public self into my private and secret self, I have never once been rejected. People are drawn to others who risk coming out into the light. Hope and healing are found in the light of being known and loved. I imagine heaven to be a place where we are free to be fully authentic. There will be no hiding, no masquerading, no acting. There will be no fear about being rejected or unloved. We will be invited to know and be known. Must we wait for heaven to begin to experience some of these realities? No, because the kingdom of heaven is present in the community of God's people.

We, the church, are called to be a sign and a foretaste of this heavenly future.

The apostle John said it this way: *"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin"* (1 John 1:5-7, NIV).

Questions for reflection:

1. Do you think God invites us to relate to him authentically, or should we put our proverbial best foot forward in our relationship with him?
2. What keeps you from being completely honest with God?
3. What is your reaction to this statement: "Authenticity is the gateway to transformation?"
4. Living authentically with other human beings can be much more difficult than living authentically with God. Why is that?
 - a) What is the potential risk of being authentic with others?
 - b) What is the potential reward of being authentic with others?
5. Jesus calls us to love our neighbor. God calls us to be ambassadors for Christ. How is this mission helped or hindered by our willingness to be authentic?
6. Bonus topic: Share with the group one thing about yourself that you really like and one thing that you don't like. Push through the resistance you feel at being this authentic.

The Value of Courage

"I've heard the cries of my people, and now I'm coming down to save them," God told Moses from a burning bush. "Now go; I'm sending you." Moses framed his objections to this assignment in the form of questions: "Who should I tell them sent me? What if they don't believe me?" Then Moses gave a series of reasons as to why he really wasn't the right guy for the job: "I've never been eloquent. I have faltering lips." Finally, he simply asked, "Lord, please send someone else."

Before we're too hard on Moses for his reluctance to say "How high?" when God asked him to jump, we need to consider some of the reasons for his fears. First, it was 40 years earlier that Moses fled from Egypt as a wanted man after having murdered an Egyptian. Why return? He had a nice life in Midian, a family, a job. Second, the Israelites had been slaves for more than 400 years. Who was he to undo what had been going on for several centuries? Third, presumably his objections were real. If he did stutter, how convincing would "Let my people go!" sound if it took a while to say?

Moses had legitimate reasons to experience the emotion of fear. Numerous times in Scripture we are told to not be afraid. I'm becoming increasingly convinced that the admonition to not be afraid does not mean "Don't experience fear." Fear is an emotion that is naturally produced by a situation that is perceived to be threatening. The command to not be afraid has more to do, I believe, with how we handle that emotion of fear. The opposite of being afraid is not the absence of fear, but rather the presence of courage.

In Ridder Church Renewal, courage is a key value. It is impossible for us to live lives of discipleship, following Christ in mission, apart from exhibiting courage. There's no way

around it. To follow Christ requires courage.

There are many good definitions of courage. The one used most frequently in the Ridder process is a three-word definition: Courage is "Doing it scared." John Wayne put his own twist on the definition: "Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway." Another helpful definition I've seen is that courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something is more important than fear.

Moses had fears, and it was only when those fears began to paralyze him from taking action that God became upset. A similar situation played out 40 years later. This time God was inviting Joshua to pick up where Moses had left off. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you," God said to Joshua in encouragement. God was well aware that this mission would stir up some fears in Joshua, and, we might say, rightfully so. Who would accept such a mission without a little trepidation? Notice God's response to those fears. *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged"* (Joshua 1:9, NIV).

Most of us have advanced in our spiritual maturity only as far as our courage has taken us. In other words, what is often standing in the way of our growth is not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of courage. It is very possible that what your church needs is not another sermon, but rather a saddling up and doing what we already know God is telling us to do.

Several months ago I was contacted by a local funeral home to conduct a graveside service for a man who had no church home. I already had one funeral scheduled that week and was preparing to leave town. I explained that I had no time to meet with the wife of

the deceased prior to the graveside service, and the funeral director assured me that she had no desire to meet with me either. She simply wanted me to provide the service in a professional manner. I showed up at the cemetery expecting a handful of people, only to find more people gathered than at any graveside service I had previously conducted. My first impression of the crowd was that this was a tough bunch of people who lived hard and it showed. I conducted the service in the professional manner as requested. Nobody was very interested in socializing afterward, and frankly, I wasn't all that interested either.

That Sunday at my church, I preached about courage and asked the congregation to reflect on one area where God was calling them to get into action—an area that would require courage. Following my own instructions, I sensed that for me, that area was getting in touch with the wife from the graveside service and asking for permission to meet with her to get to know the man for whom I had conducted the service. I am currently in the process of getting into action on that, as I left a message on her voicemail and promised to call back.

This is one small example of how the call to courage has recently played out in my life. We all have areas of disobedience that exist solely because we lack the courage to address the situation. One of the primary reasons that leaders fail, that relationships break down, that teams become dysfunctional, is because of a failure of nerve—a failure of courage.

How does one grow in courage? Unfortunately, the ways we would like to grow in courage are, in and of themselves, insufficient. We might like to read a book and gain a new insight that would make us courageous. We might like to do a devotional on the courage of Moses or Joshua to bolster our own courage. We might like to spend an extended time in prayer to make ourselves more courageous.

All of those things are good and helpful, but eventually the best way we grow in courage is by—wait for it—being courageous. It is in the act of picking up the phone and making the dreaded phone call that we grow in courage. It is in the act of having that conversation with our spouse that we have been avoiding that we grow in courage. It is in the act of “saying what’s so” in a meeting, when everything within us wants to be passive, that we grow in courage. It’s in the act of inviting the neighbor we’ve been hoping to get to know over for a meal that we grow in courage.

One thing that we can learn to do in the church to nurture this process is provide loving accountability to one another, which ties back to the value of authenticity. The church is meant to be a place where we can reveal where we are stuck in our obedience and get support for the action we believe God is calling us to take. This type of accountability comes with no shame or condemnation attached.

The fourth value in the Ridder Church Renewal process is love. It is critical to note that courage must always be connected to love. Courage apart from love is an ugly thing. You’ve probably met the person who, when it comes to courage, is “over-caffeinated,” so to speak. They will say anything. They will do anything. For them, the definition of courage is doing or saying whatever they want, when they want, and not caring what people think. God is not interested in producing tyrants any more than he’s interested in producing doormats. The command to be strong and courageous does not nullify the command to love others. In actuality, the command to love others requires enormous amounts of courage.

Questions for reflection:

1. What do you think about the statement, "The opposite of being afraid is not the absence of fear, but rather the presence of courage?"
 2. How would you define courage? What do you like or dislike about the definitions provided in this article?
 3. Can you think of a time that you acted courageously and things went well? Describe that experience and how it felt. Likewise, can you think of a time that you acted courageously and your fears were confirmed? What was that like?
 4. Is your church a place where you can authentically share an area where you are stuck and receive loving accountability in response? If so, how have you experienced that, and if not, what could your role be in serving as a catalyst in your church toward that end?
 5. Optional bonus questions for the courageous: What is one thing you feel God is leading you to do, but your lack of courage has thus far kept you stuck? What is one courageous step you could take this week to get into action, and who might you ask for loving accountability?
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The Value of Love

The fourth value embraced in Ridder Church Renewal is the value of love. Early on in our church's participation at one of the Ridder retreats, I remember confessing to my team that I had become aware that I don't love people, I use people. Most of my team carefully filtered their reaction to that admission, being as gracious as they could to my show of authenticity, but I will never forget the look of one of my team members. She was visibly distressed by my admission, and she responded by grimacing and wincing.

Nothing trumps the importance of love. Love, the Bible says, covers over a multitude of sins. If we are loving people, we can get a lot of other things wrong, but when we don't have love, all those other integrity gaps and messes are magnified.

The first and greatest command is that we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. Fortunately, God gives us a concise definition of what it means to love him:

"This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome..." (1 John 5:3)

"And this is love: That we walk in obedience to his commands." (2 John 1:6)

"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me." (John 14:21)

There's no way to talk about loving God apart from obeying God. We love God by obeying his commands, and many of his commands relate to loving one another. The definition of love as it relates to loving one another, however, is different from the definition of love as it relates to God. We love God by obeying his commands. We don't love each

other by obeying each other's commands.

Again, the Scriptures help us understand what it means to love one another.

"[T]his is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters...If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:11, 16-18)

Paul Miller wrote a book titled *Love Walked Among Us: Learning to Love Like Jesus*. In it he studied the way Jesus loved people in the Gospels. He came away with this definition for love: "Love is seeing, caring, and acting for the good of the other."

Love is seeing...

The Israelites in Egypt had concluded that God no longer saw them after 430 years of slavery. Then one day God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and said, *"I have indeed seen the misery of my people and heard their cries and now I'm coming down to rescue them"* (Exodus 3).

The psalmist, in Psalm 13, pours out his laments to the Lord: *"How long, Lord, will you forget me forever? ...Look on me and answer, Lord my God."* A chapter later the psalmist proclaims, *"The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind."*

When Jesus met Mary after her brother Lazarus had died, the Scriptures indicate that Jesus looked at her and then wept. On one occasion he met a widow whose only son had

died, and again the Scriptures note that Jesus looked at her. There was the woman who tugged on the hem of his garment, and power went out from him. He stopped and searched the crowds because it was important for him, and ultimately her, that he see her.

Love sees, but seeing alone is not enough. The priest and the Levite presumably saw the man beaten up on the road to Jericho, but they chose to walk past on the far side of the road.

Love sees and love cares...

In seeing our need, God could have chosen the far side of the road: "You got yourselves into this mess; you can get yourselves out of this mess." But instead, out of compassion, he entered into the heart of our mess.

This is where I find that I struggle with love. I care most about myself. I see needs around me but am chained by the fact that I care more about my needs, my comforts, and my wants than I do about the needs, wants, and comforts of someone else. Sometimes I get it right. Often I get it wrong.

Love sees, love cares, and love acts. I'm sure the priest and Levite saw the man on the side of the road. In fact, it's likely that they cared about the man, as I'm sure they weren't monsters or wicked to the core. But in the end, what defined them was not their inability to see or care, but rather their unwillingness to act.

Love acts. I am notorious for wanting to write thank-you cards and never doing it. On several occasions I have even gone as far as writing the card, but never got around to delivering it. I care, but my care is not accompanied by actions, so it ends up not being love. Jesus, on the other hand, demonstrated his love by an action—by laying down his life.

1 John 4:8 says that God is love. Describing God and not including the fact that God is

loving would be like describing the children's character Barney and not mentioning that he is purple, or a dinosaur. However, there is danger in thinking that love is the chief attribute of God. This type of thinking might imply that the love of God trumps his other attributes. That he is sometimes just, but always loving; or that he is sometimes holy, but always loving; or that he is sometimes full of truth, but always full of grace. We, on the other hand, might be the incarnation of love one moment and the incarnation of foul ugliness the next, because we are not always loving.

The truth is, we humans are inconsistent in who we are; God is entirely consistent in who he is. Who he is, he *always* is. He is always loving, always just, always holy, always full of grace, and always full of truth. God does not withhold love when he administers justice, and God does not withhold justice when he is expressing love. Who he is, he always is.

God is love. Jesus is God. Jesus is love—always. What that means is that no matter what page of the Gospels we flip to, whatever passage we look at, we will find Jesus full of love.

It was love when Jesus refused to condemn the woman caught in adultery. It was love when he told her to go and sin no more.

It was love when he washed the disciples' feet. It was love when he confronted them about not being able to stay awake and pray with him for just one hour.

It was love when Jesus said to Simon, "[Y]ou are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church..." It was love when Jesus rebuked Peter: "Get behind me Satan...you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

It was love when Jesus called the Pharisees a brood of vipers and whitewashed tombs. It was love when he looked down from the cross and said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

It will be love when Jesus says to the sheep on his right, "Come and share your master's happiness." It will be love when Jesus says to the goats on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

What does Jesus' demonstration of love teach us? It teaches us that we have no clue what love is. We confuse love with being nice. There are times when "nice" gets in the way of love. Usually the missing ingredient is courage.

Questions for reflection:

1. Love is seeing, caring, and acting for the good of the other. Think of a relationship in which you have loved someone well according to this definition. How did you love them? Now think of a relationship in which you failed to love someone well according to this definition. How did you fail to exhibit love?
 2. What are the greatest obstacles you routinely face in seeing, caring, and acting for the good of another person?
 3. Jesus frequently demonstrated what we might describe as "tough love." How does "being nice" sometimes interfere with your ability to genuinely love? How does love connect with courage?
 4. Sometimes our mission trips are filled with action but little seeing or caring. We paint a house but never take time to get to know the residents. Why are all three components of love critical in serving well?
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FIVE SKILL SETS

The Mental Model of Discipleship

Thus far we have talked about the end game, which is joining God in mission. We've also covered the four values: integrity, authenticity, courage, and love.

In this session we will shift to discussing the first of the five skill sets, the mental model of discipleship. I was unfamiliar with the term "mental model" prior to participating in Ridder. A mental model is the understanding we have of the nature of something and the way it works. For example, as a pastor I frequently have the privilege of sitting down with couples in the context of premarital counseling. One of the important things we uncover is the mental model of marriage that each person has. Practical questions about who does the dishes and who mows the lawn, who pays the bills and who disciplines the children, help reveal the couple's mental models of marriage.

We often inherit the mental models that we carry. If our mother paid the bills and disciplined the children and our father did the dishes and mowed the lawn, there's a good chance that we will hold that pattern to be the mental model of what a marriage should be.

As you can imagine, when people have different mental models for the same thing, sometimes those models are like bumper cars in an amusement park. The result, however, is often anything but amusing. Within a church, some people may hold the mental model that it is the pastor's job to visit all the members who are shut in. Other people may hold the mental model that it is the elders' or the deacons' job to visit the members who are shut in. Still others may hold the mental model that it is the members' job to visit

other members who are shut in. Competing mental models, even when held by people of goodwill, can really encumber a church. When the members of a church are able to buy into a similar mental model, the church is well-positioned to be used by God (provided the mental model is a healthy model).

In the Ridder process, one mental model of discipleship is advocated. Like the proverbial three-legged stool, there are three primary components to this model of discipleship.

The first component in this mental model is a commitment to *radical obedience* that leads to mission.

Modifying the word obedience with the word radical may seem redundant. There are several reasons the word "radical" is inserted. The obvious reason is that we have a tendency to negotiate our level of obedience with God. We approach obedience in the same manner we might approach a buffet: extra fries but hold the veggies. But God doesn't negotiate when it comes to obedience. There is obedience and there is disobedience. We are called to submit to God in every respect. Another reason for adding the word radical is because often we think of obeying God's explicit word, but ignore his implicit word.

I remember on the night of my bachelor party (an uneventful night, I swear), a friend teased me, "You can look, but you can't touch."

According to this logic, as long as I didn't touch another woman, I was OK. But implicitly, even the act of looking could be understood as disobedience, because Jesus

said, “[A]nyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

The second part of the definition in the Ridder model for discipleship is unique: A commitment to radical obedience *that leads to mission*.

We have a tendency to turn obedience into nothing more than a moral issue. If I don’t swear, if I give my 10 percent, if I am faithful to my spouse, if I’m honest on my taxes, then I’m living an obedient life. To be sure, there is a moral component to our obedience. But all too often, we fail to recognize God’s charge to go into the world and be his witnesses, to make disciples of all nations, as a command that demands obedience.

To overstate the case, the question could be raised, “What does it matter if you never swear, give 10 percent, and honor the Sabbath if you are not joining God in mission?” A significant portion of being obedient relates to being the hands and feet of Jesus in this world.

As we commit our lives to radical obedience, we quickly find out that we don’t have the capacity to keep our word. Disobedience haunts us even as we pursue obedience. This leads naturally to the second component of the mental model of discipleship.

The second component is cultivating a reflective lifestyle. Jesus said, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* As disciples committed to obedience, we must remain connected to the vine, Jesus Christ. The Ridder process refers to the means of staying connected to Jesus as the reflective lifestyle.

All the classic spiritual disciplines are part of the reflective lifestyle: prayer, Bible study, meditation, Scripture memorization, solitude, fasting, journaling, and others. Our regular practice of these disciplines is our spiritual workout. The spiritual workout is not an end

in itself, but rather a means to an end. The point is to draw closer to God—to be formed in such a way that our heart beats for the things for which God’s heart beats. As we draw closer to God through this practice of abiding in him, we begin to give our word to his vision for this world.

The third component to this mental model of discipleship is the *pursuit of authentic community*. There’s a reason the Scriptures warn us to not forsake the habit of meeting together. We need one another. *“Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,”* we read in Hebrews 10:24.

Growing in spiritual maturity is both a solitary and a communal experience. There are some things related to our growth that can only come in the context of community. All of the “one another” commands of Scripture require *another*. How do we grow in forgiving unless we are in relationship with those whom we may at times need to forgive? How do we learn to confess unless we are in relationship with those whom we may at times sin against?

All new drivers are taught about that dangerous blind spot that exists slightly behind and to the side of their car. The mirrors in a car reflect most of what is behind the driver, but the blind spot is hidden from view. Likewise, we all have blind spots in our maturity that are likely quite visible to others. In the context of authentic community, those blind spots can be illuminated.

The other necessity of authentic community is related to the mission of God. God’s mission is bigger than any one of us can take on. As we grow together in Christ, a vision is born for how God is calling us to participate together in mission.

Questions for reflection:

1. As relates to church, we frequently operate with different mental models and assumptions. This can be a source of conflict. What are some of the mental models held in your church as it relates to the purpose of the church, the purpose of worship, the role of the pastor, or the meaning of the gospel?
 2. What would you say is your church's mental model of discipleship, as evidenced by the strategies that are used to help believers grow in their maturity?
 3. Do you agree that we often view obedience through the lens of morality and not as much through the lens of mission? Why do you suppose that is?
 4. What is the difference between treating the reflective lifestyle (for example, quiet time) as an end in and of itself, or as a means to an end?
 5. What would be lost in your growth as a Christian if you could not participate in authentic community? What would be gained if you were able to participate in an authentic community of faith?
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Generating and Sustaining Creative Tension (Part I)

I stepped on the scale several weeks back and I could almost hear it groan.

The number staring back at me was north of 250. Several days earlier I had become dizzy while going for a walk, so I visited with a doctor later in the day. His suspicion was that I was dehydrated. Nevertheless, he had a frank conversation with me about my weight. In no uncertain terms he described my current condition, and it wasn't good. "If you do nothing about this now," he warned, "things will only get worse." He told me about the increased risks I faced as a result of my weight.

Fortunately, there was also some good news, and it was that I could lose weight. The doctor gave me a general idea, based on my height and body type, of what a healthy weight would be for me. He then gave some suggestions about how I might make progress toward that healthy weight. I share this story with you because it is a very simple illustration of the next skill set learned in the Ridder Church Renewal process, which is referred to as "generating and sustaining creative tension."

There are many layers to this skills set, so I will devote two sessions to the subject. This skill set pertains to everyone in the church, but primarily to the leadership of the church. At first glance at the phrase "generating and sustaining creative tension," the thing that pops out is the word "tension." There is more than enough tension in the church these days. Why would we have any interest in generating and sustaining more tension than already exists? The short answer is because that's what's required of good leaders. The doctor would not have been doing his job if, choosing to avoid tension, he did not mention my weight. (I've lost 15 pounds since the conversation with the doc!)

This skill set demands that a leader have a clear understanding of what is currently true about the church or organization. We refer to that as current reality. The leader not only has to know where they are—their current reality—they also must know where they want to be, or rather, where God wants them to be. We refer to this as a vision of God's preferred future. As long as we are on this side of heaven, the current reality and God's preferred future will always be offset. There will always be a gap between what is and what God desires to be. The pressing question is, how can we as leaders in the church work to facilitate the closing of that gap?

Before answering that question, it needs to be pointed out that if it were easy, the gap would already be closed. If it were easy, the current reality of the church would mirror God's vision for the church. It's not easy.

A number of obstacles stand in the way of closing the gap: 1) sin; 2) people resist change and become comfortable with certain routines; 3) change usually demands something from us that is difficult (it's easier for me to live on 2,600 calories a day than it is to live on 1,600 calories a day); 4) we often have a distorted perception of current reality—we think things are better than they really are, so there's no urgency to change; and 5) we are prone to nostalgia—we think if we just work harder at what we are presently doing, then we can return to the glory days.

The obstacles are real, and any leadership team that intends to bring change into a system can expect turbulence. We should not be surprised that there are people who are going to object to a drum set and an electric guitar, especially if it means that the organ is played less. This does not mean that they are terrible people; it means that they are

human, and humans resist change.

Current Reality

Generating and sustaining creative tension begins with articulating the current situation in a clear, shared, and compelling way. The words *clear*, *shared*, and *compelling* are important. It is one thing to make a vague statement such as, "Our church is declining in membership." It is another thing to say, "In the last five years we have lost 75 members, which represents 35 percent of our membership."

The statement could be made even clearer by identifying how many of those 75 people died, moved away, transferred membership, or simply disconnected from the church. In order for the current reality to be compelling, it must be clear. In order for the current reality to be shared, it must be as objective as possible. It can't just be one person's impression of what is true.

Every time a church is in the process of calling a pastor they are required to fill out a church profile. Essentially, that profile should be the current reality of the church. There's no way to short-circuit the work it takes to be able to articulate the current reality in a clear, shared, and compelling way.

The book of Nehemiah chronicles Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. It serves as a great case study in leadership and the skill of both generating and sustaining creative tension. The book of Nehemiah opens with Nehemiah questioning one of his brothers about current reality.

"Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.'" (Nehemiah 1:2-3)

Nehemiah responded to this report by weeping. There are a lot of motivations a leadership team may have for wanting to bring change to a church. Some of those motives could be fueled by selfish ambition. But Nehemiah was clearly motivated by love, as he wept when learning about the current state of affairs.

Nehemiah went to Jerusalem, and after he had been there three days, he decided to conduct a further examination into the city's current reality. *"...I examined the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire"* (2:13).

Once Nehemiah had a good understanding of the current reality, he was ready to communicate it in a clear, shared, and compelling way. He gathered the officials and said to them, *"You see the trouble we are in [shared]: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire [clear and compelling]"* (2:17).

What Nehemiah did that day was generate creative tension by drawing pointed attention to the current reality. Nehemiah actually heightened the sense of anxiety and tension around the idea that all was not well. He then proceeded to share with the officials a vision of God's preferred future. *"Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace...They replied, 'Let us start rebuilding.' So they began this good work"* (2:17-18).

Creative tension is tension that is designed to spark energy and enthusiasm to embark on the process of pursuing the vision of God's preferred future. There is much destructive tension in the church that is a result of the sinful ways in which we sometimes relate to one another. This tension does not serve a productive purpose. Conversely, creative tension is healthy tension. But tension is tension, healthy or unhealthy. It's easy to generate tension. The art of leadership is learning how to sustain a process that generates tension in the face of resistance.

Questions for reflection:

1. Can you think of reasons that we might resist examining the current reality of our health in our marriage, or in our family, or in our church?
 2. With the first question in mind, how do the values of courage, love, authenticity, and integrity relate to examining our current reality?
 3. What is one current reality in your church that you think needs to be shared in a clear and compelling way?
 4. Can you think of changes your church has made that have been difficult but beneficial?
 5. What do you think are the traits required in a leader to navigate the process of generating and sustaining creative tension?
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Generating and Sustaining Creative Tension (Part II)

In the last session, I introduced the skill set of generating and sustaining creative tension. I discussed the need for leaders to be able to identify current reality and communicate it in a way that is clear, shared, and compelling. Nehemiah conducted an investigation of the walls in Jerusalem and communicated his findings to the Israelite officials. *“You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire”* (Nehemiah 2:17). The analysis of the current reality must be as objective as possible so that it will be shared.

As difficult as it is to do the hard work of identifying the current reality, it is even harder to do the work of discerning a vision of God’s preferred future. Current reality is *identified*; a vision of God’s preferred future is *discerned*. In other words, identifying the current reality is an objective process, while discerning the vision of God’s preferred future is a subjective process.

For example, not long ago the church I serve did some extensive work identifying our current reality. Several things were true about our current reality: It was true that we had added more than 100 new members in seven years. It was also true that 35 percent of the new members who had joined left within a couple of years. We were a church with a sizable entry door but an equally sizable exit door.

Our current reality at the time was also that we were experiencing an increase in conflicts, both between some church members and staff, and between church members. It was a difficult season and as a result, there was a small exodus of people from our church.

It was painful to stare that reality in the face. The challenge for our church became identifying the vision of God’s preferred

future for us. We could all agree about the current reality, but there were multiple ideas about what we should do to pursue the future to which God was calling us. We took a weekend retreat that included members of consistory, staff, and other key leaders.

At the retreat we prayed and we brainstormed. There was no shortage of ideas about the routes that we could take. We came away from the retreat with a decision to focus on intergenerational, mentoring relationships in the church. The decision-making process we had used led us to that decision; however, following the retreat there was a strong sense that this was not the specific vision God was calling us to. And so we met again and engaged the process one more time. This time we came away with a three-year vision of growing in spiritual maturity and focusing on developing authentic relationships with one another and the community. There was still not unanimous agreement, but there was definitely a sense that this was what God was calling us to pursue.

I share our story to illustrate that the process of identifying a vision of God’s preferred future can be a messy, non-linear process.

There are various philosophies on leadership as it relates to defining the vision. For some people, their mental model of leadership is that the leader discerns the vision and then sounds the trumpets calling the troops to advance. For others, their mental model of leadership is that the leader’s task is to convene key leaders and arrive at a discernment of the vision together. Nehemiah’s leadership style seemed to blend these two mental models. He set out during the night to inspect the walls and took a few men with him (2:11). Identifying the current reality was a shared process. However, the next sentence reads, *“I had not told anyone*

what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem” (2:12). It would seem that the vision was arrived at individually rather than collectively.

Tension is generated when both the current reality and the vision of God’s preferred future are shared in a clear and compelling way. A helpful illustration used in the Ridder process is to think of a rubber band. One end of the rubber band is wrapped around the stake of current reality. The other end is wrapped around the stake of a vision of God’s preferred future. The amount of tension produced will be a result of how great the gap is between these two stakes. In generating tension, there is a sweet spot where there is neither so much tension that the rubber band breaks, nor so little tension that no energy is produced.

As stated in the last session, generating tension is fairly easy. Sustaining healthy tension, on the other hand, is extremely difficult. There is great energy in the beginning of the pursuit of a vision and at the end of the pursuit of a vision, but in between it can be a battle. Inevitably, resistance is met in the pursuit of the vision. That resistance can be extremely draining emotionally, physically, and spiritually. In addition, vision simply leaks over time.

In Nehemiah’s case, the resistance came in the force of overt opposition.

“When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, ‘What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall?...Tobiah the Ammonite said, ‘If even a fox climbed on it, he would break down their wall of stones.’”
(4:1-3)

Resistance can come from without. In church life, resistance is often internal. In my church’s context, there was very little initial

resistance to the vision of pursuing spiritual maturity and developing authentic relationships. The resistance began to pop up when we began to implement strategies for accomplishing our vision.

We believed that the greatest mechanism we had to help people grow in spiritual maturity was the church’s small groups. The consistory decided that we needed to hire a small group facilitator to oversee our small groups if we really were going to see them as the primary means of helping members grow. This was met with a little resistance simply because of the cost of adding staff. Also, our small groups had been very independent, which led to some resistance when we began to communicate expectations of what we wanted to be happening in the small group. “Why fix what isn’t broken?” was a response we received in a sharp email. “We don’t have to do what they’re telling us!” was another angry comment.

Resistance will come in a multitude of ways. The leader’s job is to navigate through that resistance, learning what needs to be learned, adjusting what needs to be adjusted, while keeping the vision in focus. The leader’s job is also to love those people who might be resisting in the midst of the journey. It is easy to demonize people when they react in angry and hurtful ways to the process of change. Instead, it’s helpful to understand that hurtful behavior is often the product of anxiety springing from the creative tension. That doesn’t excuse hurtful behavior, but it help us understand it.

How can leaders and consistories navigate the rough waters of change? In the Ridder process we were given several helpful ideas.

The first helpful idea is that every leader requires a network of people outside the system he or she is working in. That network can be a coach, a pastor’s circle, or a few trusted friends. This provides the opportunity for the leader to process freely what is happening and to let off steam when that needs to take place as well. The second idea

is really another skill set, and that is learning how to have difficult, or what we call “crucial” conversations with the people we are leading. (The book, *Crucial Conversations*, by Kerry Patterson, is a helpful resource.) In these conversations our task is to define ourselves by being very honest while at the same time remaining connected to the person we are conversing with. Our tendency is to avoid these difficult conversations, but the result of doing that is an increase in unhealthy tension.

One last thing needs to be mentioned with regard to the skill set of generating and sustaining creative tension. There is a saying, “If you keep doing what you’ve always done, you’ll keep getting what you’ve always got.” This is not entirely true. Right now there is a current reality that is true about all our churches. If we keep doing what we are currently doing, our churches will not be in the same position five years from now, or even one year from now. We will be facing a new current reality. If we choose not to pursue a vision of God’s preferred future but settle to stay put, there is a default future around the corner that is different than our current reality. Consequently, avoiding the tension produced by change is not an acceptable option.

Questions for reflection:

1. Does your church have a vision? If so, what is it, and how has it been communicated? If not, why not, and what may be your role in discerning a vision of God’s preferred future?
 2. What is your understanding of leadership as it relates to seeking vision? Should leaders be responsible to discern the vision and then enlist others to pursue it, or should the task of discerning vision be a communal task?
 3. What are some of the ways that resistance to change shows up in your setting?
 4. What do you think the default future of your church will be five years from now if you are content to simply do what you’ve been doing?
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Family Systems

Joey seems to be out of sorts this morning in the nursery. He's not playing nice at all.

He grabbed the toy truck that Brayden was playing with right out of his hands. Every time two-month-old Harper falls asleep in her car seat, Joey makes sure to shake the car seat and wake her up. During the snack, Joey throws his Cheerios all over the room. The adults in charge of the nursery this morning are losing their patience with Joey and are frankly thinking some pretty negative thoughts toward this three-year-old boy. One of the adults silently wonders if there is something going on in Joey's home life that is impacting his behavior. Later in the day, this adult's suspicions are confirmed. Joey's parents have been separated for a week and dad isn't living at home anymore.

This scenario is one example of family systems. In Ridder Church Renewal, one of the skill sets that participants are exposed to is systems-thinking. Systems-thinking revolves around the relationship between the individual and the group. A family, whether it consists of two members or ten members, is a system. Our inclination in seeking to understand the dynamics of the family is to focus on the individuals of the family as opposed to the family as an emotional unit. Our inclination in the above scenario would be to zero in on what's wrong with Joey as opposed to examining what is happening in the system of Joey's family.

Dr. Murray Bowen developed a theory (aptly titled Bowen Theory) to describe the nature of the family system. Several concepts are foundational in his theory.

1. What affects one member of the family, affects all the members of the family. When God created the institution of marriage, in his word he declared, *"For this reason a man will leave his father and*

mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This union, this togetherness is the basis for the family as an emotional system. In an emotional system anxiety (the automatic response to stress) travels easily between the members of that system. If one person begins vibrating with anxiety, those vibrations will pass through the entire family and every member will vibrate. We have all witnessed this in the animal kingdom. A flock of birds are gathered in a feeding frenzy around your birdfeeder. One bird notices that your cat is slowly creeping up on the unsuspecting birds. This bird flies away in a panic. The other birds don't know what the alarm is but they react to the anxiety of that bird and, in a flash, they have all flown away. The anxiety from the first bird quickly passed through the system of birds.

2. There are routine ways that individuals respond to the anxiety in a system. One of the most helpful analogies for me in understanding this is to think of your relationship, say with your spouse, as a dance. Over time, the dance becomes consistent. One partner moves one way, the other responds by moving another way. The steps become routine. Before the dance even begins, you can anticipate how it is going to play out because you have danced this dance so many times. As it turns out, there are a few dances that most family systems engage in as a result to anxiety:

The dance of emotional distance – The most common reaction to anxiety is emotionally distancing ourselves from one another. Members of a family have intuitive emotional radar that can pick up each another's anxiety. After returning from work, a husband often can get an emotional read on his wife within five seconds without a word being spoken. Likewise, children intuitively know when

there is tension and stress. One frequent way that we deal with the anxiety of another is by distancing ourselves from that person. We can't handle their anxiety without becoming anxious ourselves, so we know that it's best to go to another room and steer clear. Unfortunately, distancing ourselves in the end actually increases anxiety. The extreme form of emotional distancing is "cutoff," whereby we completely disconnect emotionally and sometimes physically from another person.

The dance of conflict – Another reaction to anxiety is conflict. Instead of withdrawing from one another, we put on our game face and prepare for battle. A great deal of emotional energy is spent in the conflict. The word "you" is lobbed like a grenade. The extreme form of conflict is physical violence. The way families engage conflict becomes fairly routine; the dance becomes familiar.

The dance of the triangle – Anxious systems seek out relational triangles. For example, mom and daughter get into an argument over the purchase of clothes for the new school year. Naturally, each of them will seek to form a triangle in the relationship by enlisting the emotional support of dad/husband.

The dance of over-functioning and under-functioning – The over-functioning person takes on responsibility that is not his or hers to take on. They tell the others what to do, how to think, or how to feel. They try to help too much and do things for the other that the other could do for herself or himself. Conversely, the under-functioning person relies on others unnecessarily and asks others to do what he or she could do for himself or herself. Whenever there is an over-functioning person, there will always be an under-functioning person.

3. Individuality can easily give way to the "togetherness force" that exists in

the family. There is a usually invisible and sometimes visible pressure on the individuals of a family to conform to the family. It can be seen in everything from what football team we root for to such things as politics. Dad is a staunch Republican and it's best for everyone else to also favor the elephant or, at the very least, to not challenge any of his ideology with an opposite ideology. This is why a second-grade student would vehemently claim to hate President Obama—not because he truly has a reason to hate the president but because of the togetherness force of his family and the pressure to conform to the opinions of another.

Healthy individuals are individuals who are able to define themselves, to say what they think, what they feel, what they believe. The term that best describes this is "self-differentiation." A healthy individual can define herself or himself while allowing others the space to define themselves as well. Furthermore, healthy individuals are able to remain connected to those who may define themselves differently.

So why does the Ridder Church Renewal process teach participants to think in terms of systems? For several reasons: One reason is because we will better understand ourselves and the family system to which we are connected. As we begin to see the way our family system deals with anxiety, we are better suited to confront the mechanisms we have learned that are unhealthy. A second reason this is valuable is so that we can become better at walking with others in the midst of their own family systems.

The greatest takeaway for me regarding family systems is that each member of the family has extraordinary power to affect the system, for better or for worse. Each member of the family has the opportunity to dance a new dance. My autopilot response to anxiety is to emotionally distance myself. When there is anxiety in my marriage, my default reaction is to want to emotionally shut down and distance myself from my wife. Of course, this dance step produces a reactionary dance

step from my wife. We've danced this dance so many times that we don't even have to think about it. But if I decide to dance in a different manner, it invariably changes the dance. If, instead of withdrawing from my wife and not communicating, I decide to lovingly engage and define myself, the dance changes.

The power of systems-thinking is revealed through the ability to dance a new dance for the glory of God.

Questions for reflection:

1. Consider the family into which you were born. Which ways of reacting to anxiety did you witness: distancing, conflict, triangling, under- or over-functioning?
 2. What would you say is your autopilot reaction to anxiety and stress?
 3. In what ways were family members pressured to conform to the family? In what ways were family members given the freedom to define themselves?
 4. Are you more prone to over-function or to under-function?
 5. What is one way you might try to dance a different dance?
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High Performance Teams

Early in my ministry I recommended to the church consistory that we rename our assorted committees as teams instead. The worship committee would become the worship team; the Christian education committee would become the Christian education team. I was certain of my reasoning; nobody wants to be on a committee, but everyone wants to be on a team.

The good-natured consistory graciously allowed me to redefine our committees under a new banner: teams! But, as the consistory probably suspected, in the end it didn't matter what we called these groups of people. The teams still struggled with a lot of the same things the committees before them struggled with: lack of enthusiasm, inconsistent attendance, failure to meet, meetings that were not productive, and more.

There is a reason that churches seek to use committees/teams to accomplish work. That reason is because, as we read in the book of Ecclesiastes, two are better than one, for they have a better return for their labor. The rationale for the use of teams is simply that we are better together. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Theoretically, two are better than one, and we are better together. Practically, there are times when the effort required to navigate the dynamics of a team seems to diminish overall productivity. Teams are extremely valuable, but they are not easy to create and sustain. In Ridder Church Renewal we were exposed to a book written by Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of Teams*. Most likely you will identify with several if not all of these dysfunctions on different teams of which you have been a member.

Dysfunction 1: The Absence of Trust

Trust is the all-important foundation of any effective team. There are numerous ways the absence of trust can poison a team. One of the most frequent symptoms of an absence of trust is when there are certain taboo topics that a team won't discuss because of fear about how someone on the team might respond. An absence of trust frequently shows up when team members find themselves tiptoeing around certain individuals on the team so as not to upset them.

The absence of trust creates a defensive environment. Words like "I don't know" or "I blew it," or "that is not my strength" are words seldom heard on a team where there is little trust. Instead, team members feel compelled to hide their weaknesses and vulnerabilities from the group because they are not sure they can trust one another to not use that against them.

Recently I participated in a performance review for someone. This person was asked to evaluate herself by answering a set of questions. The personnel committee also answered the questions, and then we got together to compare our answers. On every single question the employee gave herself the highest possible rating. Either she is blind to areas where she has room to grow, or she doesn't trust the committee with revealing the truth about those areas.

During the Ridder Church Renewal process, our team was invited to participate in a timeline exercise. On a large posterboard we used colored sticky notes to tell the broad story of our life. Yellow notes were reserved for basic information, green notes were for significant people who impacted our life along the way, blue notes were for highlights in our life, and pink notes were for painful

moments. We sat in a circle and, over the course of several meetings, we each shared our story with the others. In the circle were people who had “known” each other their entire lives, growing up together and attending church together. But the common refrain during this exercise was, “I never knew that!”

As we shared our stories the level of trust grew exponentially in our group. From the onset, it was clear that this team would be marked by trust. It would be a team where it would be both safe to know and safe to be known.

Dysfunction 2: The Absence of Conflict

On the surface, an absence of conflict sounds like a blessing. Who wants to be part of a team where there is conflict? Conflict makes my heart beat fast and my lungs gasp for air. Conflict, when occurring in an environment where there is an absence of trust, is a most uncomfortable experience. However, in an environment where there is trust, conflict serves a very useful and necessary purpose.

Two heads are better than one, but if two heads aren’t willing to ever disagree or express opposing viewpoints, the advantage of two heads is lost. Conflict, on a healthy team, can be described as robust dialogue. With every decision, there are multiple viewpoints worthy of consideration. One person may feel passionately about the direction the team should take, but he or she is overlooking an important detail. Another member of the team may be aware of that detail, and it is imperative for him or her to have the courage to express a conflicting point of view. Members of a team that is marked by trust will not punish one another for conflicting points of view. In fact, the wise team leader will purposefully seek out conflicting opinions for the sake of making the very best decision possible.

Dysfunction 3: Lack of Commitment

There is a drastic difference between

compliance and commitment. Compliance is often the result of the inability to engage in conflict (which is the result of the inability to trust). If I am unwilling to share what I really think, I may comply with decisions that I really do not support. If I am only complying with a decision, I will likely demonstrate very little energy and effort in working toward the related goals of that decision. I may even go as far as subtly trying to sabotage the decision.

Commitment to a decision will be evident with the appropriate energy and activity required to pursue related goals. It’s important to note that we can have commitment while not having agreement. Most people, if they have had the opportunity to vigorously express their viewpoint and be heard by the group, can agree to support the final decision of the team, even if it was not their preference. One common slogan used by many companies is “disagree and commit.” Disagree vigorously, debate wholeheartedly, but when the team finally makes a decision, then it is time to commit.

Dysfunction 4: Avoidance of Accountability

On a team that is functioning well, everyone is required to do real work. Nobody is allowed to merely fill a seat and show up at meetings. Consequently, when there is real work to be done, a healthy team finds ways to hold one another accountable to complete the tasks they agreed to do.

This is not easy because a) we don’t like to be held accountable, and b) we don’t like the awkward exchange of holding one another accountable.

The dysfunction for many teams is caused by frustration and bitterness that builds below the surface because of an unwillingness to address issues of accountability above the surface. Healthy teams agree that accountability is not just the job of the chairperson but everyone’s job. We are all called to exercise responsibility for the work

of the team. If there is a high level of trust, conversations centered on keeping one another accountable can happen and be extremely life-giving.

Dysfunction 5: Inattention to Results

Many teams suffer simply because of a failure to evaluate how they are doing in making progress toward their goals. The team continues to do what it has always done because it's familiar, with little attention to whether or not their activities are achieving the desired results.

Healthy teams will identify and commit to a vision, plan for the best way to accomplish that vision, and then evaluate the results of their work to see if the team is being effective.

When teams are able to root out these five dysfunctions and replace them with more helpful and healthy ways of functioning together, than the saying, "Two are better than one," is true.

Questions for reflection:

1. Can you share an experience of serving on a productive team? What was it about that team that made it a healthy team?
 2. What do you think is the greatest hindrance to having healthy, productive teams?
 3. On a scale of 1-10, rate your ability to define yourself when your viewpoint may be different than one that has already been expressed. (Say honestly what you think and feel.) Are you more likely to:
 - a. Become silent and acquiesce to the will of the group without expressing yourself?
 - b. Be passive-aggressive (either resort to sarcasm/humor to express your disagreement or use non-verbal cues to communicate what you are unwilling to say)?
 - c. Be overly aggressive in advocating for your viewpoint (for example: "If you don't agree with me on this you're an idiot"?)
 - d. Communicate passionately for your view while remaining connected to others who are communicating passionately for their view?
 4. What one or two things could you work on to be a more helpful team member?
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Organizational Systems

A patient makes an appointment to see her doctor. An angry, red rash has broken out on her arms. When the doctor examines the rash, there are two primary questions she wants to answer: 1) What is this? 2) How do I treat it? A good doctor will know that the rash is likely a symptom of something else going on beneath the surface. The doctor could prescribe an ointment that might bring temporary relief to the symptom of the rash; however, if the deeper health concern is not discovered and addressed, the healing will only be temporary.

Organizations often present themselves in the same manner that a patient might present herself to a doctor. There may be obvious problems, but those problems are only symptoms of deeper root issues. Symptoms are magnets for attention. The process of digging past the symptoms begins with asking "why?" "I see there's a rash. Why is there a rash?"

Systems are complex when related to family dynamics. Systems are incredibly complex when related to larger organizations such as a church.

One of the symptoms I bumped up against early on in the church I serve was a sense of resignation whenever the topic of our church building was raised. Our building is almost 100 years old and presents many challenges to doing ministry: an abundance of stairs, an elevator that is too small for today's wheelchairs, the absence of a welcoming area for greeting people, a bathroom located at the front of the sanctuary (Do I really need to go that bad?), classrooms that are barely large enough for kids to gather around a table...I could go on.

Early in my tenure it was clear to me that we were in need of significant remodeling/addition work. Nobody disagreed. But as

soon as we began to seriously discuss what we should do, a spirit of resignation settled over us.

I soon learned what was present in the shadows of the system: the conversation to remodel and build was a 20-year-old conversation. In fact, 20 years or so earlier, an architect had been hired and plans had been developed to build a beautiful addition. The church got on board and money was raised. There was a threshold of money that had to be given before the foundation hole would be dug, and, unfortunately, the money that came in fell slightly below that threshold. The hole was never dug. Over the course of the next 20 years, the conversation was resurrected several times, but in the end, the hole was never dug. Now nobody wants to talk about the building, because there is the belief that the hole will never be dug.

If there is any hope of that hole ever being dug, it will require us to open up wounds that occurred 20 years earlier. Until that integrity gap is addressed, the church will not be able to engage in conversation about the future of our building.

The human body consists of multiple subsystems: cardiovascular, nervous, skeletal, muscular, respiratory, digestive, and several other systems. Doctors must be proficient in their knowledge of these various subsystems to understand why they function the way they do. The same is true in relation to churches. The church consists of multiple subsystems: boundaries, context, feedback, heritage, leadership, ministry, and mission and vision.

Of course, none of these subsystems operate in a vacuum. They weave in and out of each other, impacting, and being impacted by, one another. Several questions help get at the level of health in each system. (For a more

thorough evaluation, Google "church assessment." The following questions come from the BodyLife assessment.)

Boundaries – Is our location accessible? The fact that our elevator is not large enough to accommodate many of today's wheelchairs is a significant boundary. Boundary questions are not just related to the physical structure. One question to consider in relation to boundaries is whether there are clear expectations of members or not. Are members expected to tithe? Are members expected to participate in a small group, or serve on a work group? These are boundary questions.

Context – What are the needs of the people in our community? What are the demographics? What other churches are serving in this community, and are there opportunities for partnership with these congregations?

Feedback – Is there an agreed-upon process for members to communicate with leadership? How is information gathered and disseminated?

Heritage – Is there any experience from the past that has not been formally reconciled (like collecting funds to build an addition but never digging a hole)? What strengths from the past are celebrated as the congregation looks to the future? What is the congregation's reputation in the community?

Leadership – Does the congregation have a clear pathway for ongoing personal transformation? Does the congregation value and model healthy conflict? Do leaders have a common sense of mission and vision?

Ministry – Does the congregation experience passionate worship together? What are the current ministry opportunities presented by the congregation? How is the church engaged in service to the community?

Mission and Vision – What are the core values of the congregation? Do leaders have

a clear vision of God's preferred future? What evidence is there for a sense of urgency regarding the mission and vision?

Whatever is true about the subsystems of your church, it's important to note that the systems are designed perfectly to get what you are currently getting. In other words, the church has done everything "right" to get where she is. The only way to improve the health of a church is to address the systems of a church. Change requires altering systems and structures, or else you will continually get what you have always gotten.

Questions for reflection:

1. Why do you think we focus a lot of energy on addressing symptoms without digging deeper into the system?
 2. In your setting, what subsystems in the church would you evaluate as the healthiest? What subsystem is most in need of attention?
 3. React to the statement, "You're doing everything right to get where you are."
 4. What is one subsystem in the church that could be addressed that might provide the greatest leverage for obtaining health in the organization?
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Ridder Church Renewal—Has It Made a Difference?

This session addresses the most important question: Has Ridder Church Renewal made a difference in my life as a pastor and leader, and in the life of Second Reformed Church in Fulton, Illinois?

Recently I had the opportunity to answer that question when it was asked by the member of another church that is just entering into the process. My answer was that in the nine years I have had the privilege of serving Second as pastor, I believe the Ridder Church Renewal process has been the most profitable thing I/we have done.

How has Ridder made a difference?

For me: I have been impacted by Ridder in numerous ways. At the very first Ridder retreat I was coupled with a catalyst (coach) whose job was to help me process the content and hold me accountable to taking on the challenging assignments that we were given. Every week we had a coaching call where I would update him on my progress and share where I was getting stuck. The benefit of this weekly phone call was tremendous. That is not to say they were always easy phone calls. There were times when I dreaded the conversation but was always grateful for the blessing of the conversation when we hung up. My catalyst helped me confront some of my integrity gaps and autopilot ways that interfered with my leadership.

In addition to the value of having a catalyst, I found the learning and practice around the four values of integrity, authenticity, courage, and love to be so significant. Every relationship I have, from my relationships with my wife and children to my relationships with friends and strangers, has been impacted by these values.

I'm slowly learning to walk in integrity and

clean up messes when I'm out of integrity.

I have been challenged to be much more authentic than I have ever been. I have engaged crucial conversations with courage when my natural inclination is to passively avoid these difficult conversations. I've been challenged to reconsider what it means to love in light of the way Jesus loved and loves.

The skill set that has made the most impact on me is that of generating and sustaining creative tension. This skill set has provided me an overview of what my role as a leader is in the church. God has called me to generate creative tension by holding up the mirror of our current reality and then holding up the vision of what God is calling us to as a church. God is then calling me to sustain this tension in the most emotionally healthy way I can so that we as a church can progress toward God's vision of a preferred future.

Another blessing of Ridder is the opportunity to be a part of the presenting team. It is often said that teaching is the best method of learning. I've been afforded the opportunity to teach some of the core content, which has spurred my own learning and efforts at mastery.

Our Ridder team: One of the greatest aspects of Ridder is that it is not just geared toward pastors, but rather toward leadership teams. Our Ridder team consists of full-time staff members and several key leaders. We have now experienced five retreats and will soon experience our sixth together. There has been immense value in just getting away together. But even more importantly, we have been exposed to this teaching together and have learned a new way of being together. There is a new language that we can speak (Ridder language). When we gather for our small group meetings, we

begin by asking a question of someone based on the Ridder content. For example, I ask, "Laura, where are you currently out of integrity?" Laura answers and then she asks, "John, where are you faking it?" John answers and then asks, "Tom, what crucial conversation are you avoiding?" The level of authenticity and intimacy is high.

The church: The Ridder process does not bring quick change to a church. It begins with the conviction that personal transformation precedes corporate transformation, so much attention is given to our individual transformation. Gradually, the transformation of individuals does permeate the system. I preach differently. Tom and Karen serve on consistory differently. Laura, Sara, and Steve serve as staff members differently. The church is getting the Ridder content all the time, whether they know it or not.

Several years ago we did the hard work of holding up the mirror and examining our current reality. Following that, key leaders took a retreat and worked together at discerning God's preferred future. God gave us a three-year vision of growing in spiritual

maturity and developing authentic relationships with one another. We are in the middle of that three-year vision and there have already been significant impacts on our church. We have altered the way we do small groups to make sure that they are fostering discipleship and mission. Our level of authenticity in worship has risen dramatically. We have navigated through some difficult conflicts and managed to deal with the anxiety in more healthy ways.

The broader church: Fortunately, three other churches in our area have also participated in the Ridder process. Engaging this with other local churches has impacted the way we relate to one another as churches. A spirit of competition has been replaced with a spirit of collaboration. We truly care for one another and are mutually invested in the community.

Do I recommend that your church participates in Ridder Church Renewal? Wholeheartedly. I'd be happy to speak with anyone trying to discern whether or not God is calling them to participate in this process of renewal.